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OR,

SOLD to SATAN.

A Romance of the Devil's Mountains,
Arizona.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "HUSTLER HARRY," "CAPTAIN
NAMELESS," "OLD DISMAL, THE RANGE
TRAMP," "COLONEL COOL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS.

"So ye're frum Denver, are ye, pard? Waal, Denver's er right smart town, I'll allow, an' I hev bin thar ter see. Thar's er leetle too much o' it fer Yank Rollins ter be cooped up in. I never c'u'd stan' these yar cities nobow. Thar's sech an infarnal racket an' hustle in ther most o' 'em thet it jest nacherly r'iles a pore devil all up an' makes him feel like he hed run his nozzel inter a hornets' nest. People go whewin' 'rout'

FEAR AND DEFIANCE WERE WRITTEN ON THE FACE OF THE DIAMOND SPORT, WHILE SILVER-EDGE SETH'S FEATURES WERE CORRUGATED WITH PASSION.

like ev'ry blamed one o' 'ema wuz er wild hoss with a burr under his tail. Why, pard, it's an axchual fac' thet I got so skeered ther time I wuz in Denver thet I hed ter take my rope an' bitch myself ter a post like I wuz er hoss ter keep frum runnin' away an' doin' damage ter my own antimony! Truth, b'gash!"

Loyal Kingdon laughed. He saw he had struck a "character" in the hatchet-faced, round-shouldered old miner known as "Yuma" Yank Rollins. Quite by accident they had met in the small Arizona mining town of Kicker's Bar, which was situated on a Salt River tributary, and becoming slightly acquainted, they were now sitting at a card-table within the "Full Hand Saloon."

Loyal was a really manly-appearing young fellow of twenty-two or three; and, without assuming a self-conceited air, he had the aspect of one who knew how to look after himself. His eyes were dark and his brown hair covered his head in a mass of natural curls. His face was smooth-shaven, having a ruggedness which admirers of regular outlines might not have found satisfactory to their taste, but which really gave him an air of mental strength and balance which, combined with a physically perfect body, wins a woman's attention and admiration quicker than anything else.

The scene within the saloon was like that to be seen in almost any new strike. The bar was doing a rushing business, many of the card-tables were in use, and a faro lay-out was paying the house a good per cent.

The men collected within the place represented half-a-score different nationalities. They were nearly all rough, bearded fellows who had plainly become accustomed to the harsh side of life. The clothing of the majority was adapted to their surroundings, the most picturesque being that of the few Mexicans who strutted around the room.

One of the most noticeable of those present was known in Kicker's Bar as Major Nepal Navrain. He was at least six feet tall, broad-shouldered, commanding in appearance, having a military air which seemed to say his title was no honorary bestowal of the Western land, where men who have never seen a sword are known by all the army appellations of dignity, from captain to general. The greater portion of his features was hidden by a luxuriant and well-kept beard, and glasses concealed the expression of his eyes, which, he said, were injured in battle.

"I've heern say he's a sort o' high cock o' ther walk in these parts," Yuma Yank had explained to Loyal Kingdon, when the young Denverite asked about the major. "He's purty well known all over this section, an' they say he's got er fine ranch over 'twixt this an' ther Devil's Mountains, 'sides a payin' mine down in ther Gila region. He's er sport, too, ther major is."

The young man had not forgotten these words, and after the old miner had expressed his opinion of cities in general and Denver in particular, Loyal succeeded in turning him back to a point of interest.

"You say this Major Navrain owns a ranch over toward the Devil's Mountains?"

"Yep."

"Have you ever been over that way?"

"Waal, I've tramped consider'ble over Arizony, I'll submit, but thar am a part o' ther Mogollon Range thet I never hed nary hanker-in' ter stick my nozzle inter, an' thet's ther part known as ther Devil's Mountains."

"You had reasons for keeping away?"

"You bet yer!"

"But they say gold has been found there."

"I never yit hev seen er man thet kem frum ther Devil's Mountains an' wuz rendy ter swar he saw er bit o' yaller thar diffrent then ther yaller o' ther sun in ther sky."

"But have you never heard the stories of gold discoveries among those mountains?"

"Yep."

"You do not believe them?"

"Waal, now I hain't sayin' thet; but I am sayin' them mountains is a mighty good place ter keep out of."

"What do you mean?"

"Ef er man is hankerin' ter die, he'd best strike fer ther Ole Nick's back door."

Loyal looked puzzled.

"Old man," he said, laying his hand on Yuma Yank's arm, "you know something of that section that would be of interest to me, for I am going there."

The veteran drew back and regarded the Man from Denver critically before he replied. Then, as he soberly shook his head, he declared:

"You don't look like er fool, pard, but—"

"But what?"

"Thar must be suthin' ther matter w'ith yer upper story ef ye are really goin' ter ther Devil's Mountains."

"Why?"

"Ye don't want ter commit skewicide, do ye?"

Loyal laughed. "Well, I am not seriously thinking of taking my life," was his reply.

"You'll do it ef you go whar ye say ye're goin' ter!"

"How is that?"

"It's mighty few thet ever come back from

them accursed hills o' barren blackness! Them as goes thar usually leave their bones thar an' are never heerd of arterwards."

"Why is that?"

"Now, don't ye go fer ter ax me too much, fer I don't know ev'rythin'; but it am an' actual fac' thet w'at I say is true. I've knowed er few good boys thet struck fer them mountains an' wuz never seen ur heerd of arterwards. Thar wuz 'Frisco Jack, as white er pard as ever sheered my blanket, he heerd ther yarns 'bout thar bein' gold over in them black hills, an' he struck fer it. Thet wuz two y'ars ergo, an' he hain't never been seen ur heerd of sence. Rob Riddles, Jim Finch, Andy Scraggs—all them galoots started fer ther Devil's Mountains an' never kem back."

"What became of them?"

"Now, you say!"

"But you said, or inferred, you had seen men who came from these mysterious mountains."

"Yep."

"Then some have come back?"

"Waal, pard, ther fac' is they didn't go very fur inter ther mountains. Ef they hed, they never'd got out. As it wuz, some o' 'em kem derned nigh leavin' their bones thar."

Once more the young Denver man laughed.

"What you have said only makes me the more eager to penetrate the mysterious fastnesses of the uncanny range," he asserted. "These men who came back did not go far enough to learn if the stories about gold discoveries were really true. They were probably frightened out by their own imaginations."

Yank gave his companion a queer look.

"It's all well enough ter talk like that, settin' hyer whar it's safe, but w'en er feller comes ter facin' w'at thar is ter be seen in ther Devil's Mountains, I reckon he don't hev much stuff inter his backbone."

"Well, what is to be seen there?"

The old prospector shook his head.

"It hain't fer me ter say, fer you w'u'd only laugh at me. I s'pose you know how ther region got its name?"

"No."

"Waal, ther mountains are all barren an' black like they hed bin scorched in ther fires o' ther hot place, an' it is actually said ther Ole Boy hes an openin' in ther heart o' ther mountains thet leads right straight down inter ther infernal regions! Fact, b'gash!"

"Do you take stock in such a silly tale?"

Yank leaned back and stared hard at the questioner.

"I like you, boy," he finally declared, slowly rubbing the end of his sharp nose with the thumb and fore-finger of one hand. "Ef it wuzn't fer thet, I w'u'dn't talk ter ye a tall 'bout this, fer by ther look o' yer eyes I kin see you are laffin' at ther ole man. But you're young an' full o' fire thet sets ye whoopin' over uvverythin', an' more'n hafe ther time, ye don't stop ter think 'fore ye jump. I'm goin' ter tell ye one thing more."

"Go ahead, and be sure I appreciate your kind intentions."

"This is suthin' more then t'other story—or heap sight harder ter swaller. Ter git a look at ther Devil's Mountains, er critter might 'most believe they hed been scorched by ther fire thet comes out o' ther openin' in their heart thet leads ter ther lower regions, but it is purty hard fer er man ter believe ther devil hisself—ther ginoowine Ole Varmint—hes bin seen cavortin' 'round over them mountains—now hain't it?"

Loyal lifted a hand to his face to partially conceal the smile that would come, despite his effort to restrain it.

"That would be hard to believe," he agreed.

"But thet's w'at people hev seen!"

"I am afraid you are superstitious, Yank."

"I dunno w'at thet derned long word means, I'm only tellin' w'at people hev tole fer facts, an' it is said thet oncet ur twicet ther Ole Sarpint hes got so fur as ter come outside ther mountains whar he hes his back door."

"What is he said to look like—must have horns, tail, hoofs and all those things?"

"He's said ter be er horrible-lookin' critter all kivered with red, hev'n only one eye an' with tusbes they stick plumb out o' his mouth. He has—"

But Yank was interrupted by a burst of laughter from Loyal, who suddenly became quite unable to restrain his merriment. However, the young Denverite expressed his mirth as quickly as he could, leaning forward and letting his hand fall on that of the veteran miner, who was scowling blackly.

"Don't be angry, Yank!" he entreated.

"You must not mind me; I could not help it. I am always laughing in that way just when I ought to keep my mouth closed. It is not you I am laughing at, but the story—the preposterous story!"

Rollins's face cleared a trifle, but he growled: "Thar are lots o' people round in these yar parts as kin swar they hev seen ther very critter I hev bin tellin' about."

"I don't doubt it, old man, for it is plain there are some mighty hard drinkers in this little town. If they do not see snakes, they must see something else, and it is little wonder that something is the Old Fellow himself."

Yank's features relaxed, and he nodded his agreement.

"They do surround er mortal heap o' p'ison!" he confessed; "but it hain't er fin-vernish thet's responsible fer my story. Thar is jest sech er critter as I hev bin tellin' about, an' I hain't ther boy as keers 'bout 'temptin' ter git fame by twistin' his tail. I'm goin' ter keep outer his clutches jest as long as I kin. I dunno's thar's only one man as knows ther hull secret o' ther Devil's Mountains."

"Who is that?"

"A strange sport, known as Diamon' Dion."

"Where does he hang out?"

"No one knows, but they say it's somewhar in them same mountains."

"Then there is one man who can live there."

"Yep; but he's er mystery."

"How?"

"Waal, I can't jest 'splain, but thar's suthin' sing'ler 'bout him. He is larger then Major Navrain, heap 'sight, ur looks ter be, an' is ther handsomest 'an' sternest-lookin' man I ever saw!"

"Then you have seen him?"

"Yep."

"He comes out of the mountains sometimes?"

"Yep; he comes out ter hev er leetle game, fer he don't seem able ter keep erway from ther keerds."

"Why is he called Diamond Dion?"

"'Cause o' tner big di'mon's he wears. He dresses loud. This critter as some thiaks is ther devil is known as Devil Don."

"Diamond Dion and Devil Don," mused Loyal, speaking his thoughts aloud. "If both these beings exist and stand in my path, I shall go into the Devil's Mountains. There is a fortune there for some one, and why shouldn't it be for me?"

"Thet's ther way with youngkers with sap an' vinegar in their veins!" grunted Yank. "They don't keer er hoot fer nuthin', but they learn ter be more prudent w'en they gits older—ef they live!"

"I have come from Denver for the purpose of penetrating this haunted region, and I am not the one to turn back now."

"Got a reg'ler gold fever?"

"Possibly so, but I expect to find it all mined for me."

"How's thet?"

"I am not looking for a placer or a quartz mine."

"No?"

"Not much."

"W'at then?"

"Look here, old man, do you talk much?"

"Not w'en ther word is 'mum.'"

"Well, mum it is, and I will tell you something."

"Let her flicker, an' I'm dunab arter this."

"I am on a treasure hunt, and I expect to find the gold already mined by other hands. It is hidden in the Devil's Mountains. The man who finds it will be a millionaire, at least."

"Sho!"

"It is a fact."

"An' you putt stock in thet kind o' stuff?"

"I have reason to."

It was Yank's turn to laugh, and laugh he did in his heartiest manner, thumping the table with one bony fist.

"Oh, he! he! he!" came from the old fellow's beardless lips. "Thet jest knocks me all out. I hev bin keepin' back one thing 'bout them mountains fer fear you w'u'd hev ernother gig-glin' fit at me, but I reckon I'll hev ter tell now."

Loyal joined in the merriment and urged the old miner to tell what he had been keeping back.

"Waal," drawled Yank, "it hes bin said thet besides ther devil seen in them yar mountains thar has been seen er woman thet is poorty enough ter be an angel. She—"

Through the open door of the saloon came a cry of distress—the cry of a female!

The rough men started and uttered exclamations of amazement, for the sound was an unusual one in Kicker's Bar.

In at the open doorway darted a young girl of seventeen or eighteen. Her head was uncovered and her golden red hair streamed in an unconfined mass over her shapely shoulders. Her dress was of fine material, and had plainly been a choice garment in bygone days, but it was now torn in several places. That the girl was beautiful became evident at a glance.

A short distance within the saloon she halted, glancing around like a hunted deer. Then she threw her body forward a bit, extended her arms appealingly, a beseeching light in her heavy blue eyes, crying:

"Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen! help me—save me! Do not let those terrible wretches touch me again! I had rather die!"

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE IN THE FULL HAND.

THE appeal was enough to touch the heart of the most callous, but the men within the saloon seemed suddenly paralyzed by the vision of beauty that had burst upon them. They were only aroused when two ruffianly-looking fellows came rushing in after the girl.

"Hyer she is!" exclaimed one, with satisfaction, as he advanced upon the girl—"hyer's ther ongrateful hussey thet'd run away from her own daddy!"

"Stand off!" cried the girl, facing him with clinched hands, her blue eyes blazing. "Do not dare to touch me, you brutal wretch!"

"Now thet's er poorty name ter call yer own daddy, hain't it!"

"You are no father of mine!"

"Now, will you hear thet, pard?" and the man turned toward his companion. "She even denies thet I am her own flesh-an'-blood pap!"

"Pore gal!" said the other, with assumed sorrow. "Sae's clean out of her head—plumb daft!"

The first one, a red-whiskered individual with the face and eyes of of a ruffian, turned toward the defiant girl.

"Come now, Liz," he said, in as pleasant a tone as he could command, "this yar's played out! W'at yer want ter act so much like er precious fool fer! Jest come erlong peaceable like with me."

"I will not!"

"Wal, ye'll hev ter!"

"I shall appeal to these men; they will protect me, I am sure."

"They hain't no right ter step atween a father an' his own child."

"But I say you are not my father!"

"An' I say I am!"

"You cannot deceive these gentlemen."

"Don't want to; I've got proof of w'at I claims."

"What proof?"

"Chet hyer."

"A ruffian of your own stamp! You can make no one believe your assertions!"

"D'yer think so? Wal, thet's whar ye makes er mighty big mistake. You've got ter come erlong now, Liz—"

"My name is not Liz."

Again the red-bearded rascal turned to his comrade.

"Jest listen ter thet!" he cried, despairingly. "W'y, she's crazy as er bed-bug! She even denies her own name!"

"Pore gal!" sighed the other once more.

A sudden burst of anger seized the girl.

"Oh, you wicked wretches!" she cried, trembling with passion. "You shall be punished for this! When Seth Culver lays his hands on you, you will suffer!"

"Thar she goes ergin'!"

"Allus talkin' 'bout thet 'maginary person!"

"You will find there is nothing imaginary about him when he reaches you, and he will not rest till you are trailed down. Then you will wish you never had touched me!"

"It's useless ter talk with her, pard," asserted the red-bearded man's comrade. "Jest git her away where she will be quiet as soon as possible."

But Major Navrain came forward

"Hold on a moment," came commandingly from the old soldier's lips. "Will you kindly explain the meaning of this singular scene?"

The red-beard scowled.

"This is my gal," he explained.

"I did not know you had a girl, Taos Tom."

"Wal, I hev; but she's out of her head an' thinks she hain't my own kid."

"It is not true, sir!" cried the girl, starting toward Major Nepal. "This man helped steal me from my home, and—"

"Thar, thar!" harshly broke in the one the major had addressed as Taos Tom. "I sh'u'd think you'd git tired of tellin' thet yarn, Liz!"

"It's 'cause she is out of her head," nodded the other, whose huge nose, which had been broken at some past time, was seriously turned to the left side of his face. "Ef she hain't clean daft, my handle hain't Crook-nose Chet."

"Do not believe them!" entreated the maiden.

"I am in my right mind, and it is true this man who says he is my father helped abduct me from my home. He is—"

"Thar, Liz, thet'll do!" snarled the red-whiskered tough, advancing as if to lay hands on her. "You kin invent more lies then a settin' hen c'u'd hatch in a yar of stiddy business. Jest you close your clapper an' come erlong."

Up to this moment Loyal Kingdon had made no move to interfere, for he had wished to thoroughly understand the case. Now he spoke to Yuma Yank:

"I am going to dip in. Are you with me?"

"Ter stan' by ther leetle leddy? Yes, ter ther last gasp!"

"Then come on."

Taos Tom suddenly found himself confronted by a well-built and resolute-appearing young man who stepped between him and his intended victim.

"Hold a little on here!" commanded Loyal, calmly. "I should advise you to keep your hands off this young lady if you wish to continue in good health."

The ruffian started back in amazement.

"Who in blazes are you?" he snapped, clinching his huge hands and looking as if he contemplated annihilating the audacious young man.

"I am the young lady's friend."

"Thet's so," nodded Yuma Yank, "an' I'm ernother. Ther two o' us is jest erbout enough ter down you an' your pard, so hoe right in an' try ter climb us ef yer wants to. You'll fine us right hyer."

"Go slow, Taos Tom," cautioned Major Navrain. "If this girl is yours and you can prove it, you can have her; but if she is not yours, you cannot lay a hand on her."

"Derned ef I know 'bout his layin' er han' on her anyhow!" grunted the round-shouldered miner. "Ef she don't want ter go with him, I reckon thet settles it."

"Now hear thet!" cried Taos Tom, appealing to the crowd. "This leetle ole runt w'u'd rob me of my only chile! Kin sech things be in er free an' 'lightened kentry? Echo answers: 'No!'"

"Not by er derned sight!" agreed Crook-nose Chet. "You kin prove you are thet gal's lawful pap, fer I'll sw'ar ter it, an' I 'low thet will settle it fu'st off an' fer good."

The girl laid a trembling hand on Loyal's arm. "I know you will not believe them!" came earnestly from her lips. "They are wicked men!"

"Their faces betray that fact. You need have no fear of my believing them, miss; I would not believe them on oath. They shall not touch you again."

The toughs began to reach for their weapons, but Yuma Yank's voice rung out warningly:

"Ef ye try it, I'll drap ye! I hev got my fingers on my tools. Slow an' easy!"

"That is right," chimed in the old soldier. "I have an eye on you, Taos Tom. It is useless for you to try to resort to arms, for you will only get the worst of a struggle with the odds against you!"

"It's er burnin' shame, thet's w'at it is!" fumed the angry tough, glaring around at the crowd. "I'd like ter know ef an hones' man hain't got no frien's in this saloon thet'll help him frum bein' robbed of his own flesh an' blood? I'd like—Great Moses!"

In at the low doorway stepped a man who was obliged to stoop to avoid striking his head. At least six feet and three inches tall, he looked even taller then, and he was "built from the ground up."

Pausing to survey the scene before him, he inquired:

"What is the trouble here?"

"Holy poker!" muttered Yuma Yank. "It is Diamond Dion!"

CHAPTER III.

GOLIATH APPEARS.

"DIAMOND DION!"

The name passed from lip to lip, and the inmates of the Full Hand looked at the new-comer in wonder, curiosity and awe.

The man's attire was picturesque. The black, glazed sombrero of the Mexicans was worn upon his head. The fanciful Mexican jacket which he wore was open sufficiently at the throat to expose some of the corded shirt of dove-gray color and wide rolling collar, a bright-colored tie being knotted sailor-fashion in front. A sash of webbing around his waist supported his polished weapons, and his pantaloons were tucked into the tops of high boots, spurred at the heels.

The man's face was stern but handsome, his eyes dark and piercing, his mustache having a certain droop that gave him a grave air.

The diamonds which gave him his name flashed from his fingers, his tie, and various other parts of his clothing. That they were gems of the first-water and very valuable, was apparent to a practiced eye.

Loyal Kingdon regarded the man with interest for a moment.

"What is the trouble here?" again asked Diamond Dion. "There seems to be something the matter."

Involuntarily the fair girl shrunk from the man, chokingly whispering loud enough for Loyal to hear what she said:

"That face! Where have I seen it before? That man is another of my enemies—I know it!"

The young Denverite hastened to reassure her, during which time Taos Tom was humbly explaining to the Diamond Sport that the girl was his daughter.

"Well, if she is your daughter, why is she here?" was the stern demand. "This is no place for a beautiful girl scarce more than a child."

"I knows thet, pard, but she's o'nery—she w'u'd come hyer spite of all I c'u'd do. She's er leetle out."

"A little what?"

"Out, daft, crazy."

"Ah?"

"Fact, pard. She thinks I hain't her own flesh-an'-blood pap, an' thet I am some miser'ble devil as is tryin' ter injure her."

Diamond Dion regarded the red-whiskered tough sternly for several seconds.

"Are you sure you are not what she claims?" he demanded.

"Sure? W'y, Pard Di'mon's, thet's my own only offspring, ther chile of er good mother as ever breathed. D'yer s'pose I dunno my own kid?"

"Well, I know you, Taos Tom, and I cannot

say I know any good of you. If that beautiful girl is your child, it is one of the unexplainable freaks of nature. She is—"

Loyal Kingdon never heard the completion of that sentence.

Within the saloon the two toughs, Tom and Chet, had many friends, and these friends had not been idle. While so much talk was being indulged in, they had formed a plan to aid the girl's foes in getting her away, and the appearance of Diamond Dion seemed the very thing they needed to make their schemes successful. The Diamond Sport attracted the attention of those who were interested in the girl's protection, and gave their enemies a chance to get in their work.

Neither Loyal nor Yuma Yank saw the figures which approached behind them, but suddenly the younger man was dealt a blow that sent him reeling to the floor, and at the same time the old miner was tripped down, kicked and trampled upon.

From a score of throats rose a wild yell that made the lights tremble and flicker, half a dozen revolvers cracked, a jingle of breaking glass followed, then—darkness came!

With the sudden darkness there was a wild surge of the men within the saloon, as if they had been seized by the terror which controls the furious cattle of a stampede. It seemed as if every man was madly battling to get out—out—out! A fear of death, a nameless horror, was upon them.

By rare good fortune, the blow which dropped Loyal Kingdon to the floor sent him under a table, the legs of which had been made fast to the planking for some reason. The table was rigid, and withstood the shocks of the men who rushed against it in the darkness, otherwise the young man would have been trampled on and seriously injured, for he was stunned for the time.

In trying to struggle to his feet, Yuma Yank was overthrown and cast under the very table which protected the Denverite, and he had presence of mind enough to keep quiet.

For at least three minutes the struggle continued, the howling of the mob making a fearful din. Windows were smashed in the desperate departure, and other injuries to the place done.

When it was all over, Yuma Yank crept out from beneath the table, sat up on the floor with his back against one leg of the shelter that had protected him, and deliberately struck a match. A groan at his side attracted his attention, and, flashing the light in that direction, he discovered Loyal, who was starting up to glare wildly around.

"Hello, pard!" grinned the round-shouldered miner. "Are ye all thar? Felt ernother feller in thar with me, but I didn't know who it wuz. Reg'ler jamboree, wuzn't it?"

"What has happened?" asked the Man from Denver.

"Oh, northin' uncommon," was Yank's calm reply. "It kem kinder suddint like, thet wuz all. Ef thar hed been er reg'ler knock-down-an'-drag-out row, I'd bin 'spectin' it, but as it wuz, I must confess it ketched me by s'prise, an' I— Holy blizzards!"

With this exclamation, Yank dropped the match, the flame of which had burned his fingers.

A few moments later lights were brought into the saloon, and they revealed the body of a man lying in the center of the floor, face downward, the haft of a knife rising between his shoulders.

"Pore devil!" muttered Yuma Yank. "He's got it fer keeps! Some inemy improved ther chance ter do him up in er foul manner, an' thet's Gospel!"

When the man's face was seen, the barkeeper exclaimed:

"It's Ike Hurd, Crook-nose Chet's wu'st enemy! He's a goner!"

"But, where is the girl?" asked Loyal Kingdon, gazing around the room in a dazed manner. "What has become of her? I do not understand just what has happened."

Yank explained all that had occurred.

"It was a trick to get her away!" cried Loyal. "Her enemies played the game, and she is in their power again!"

"Reckon ye're right, pard."

"Follow me! We will see if she is to be found!"

They hurried out of the saloon and indulged in a vain search for the maiden and her enemies, but neither of the three were found. Finally, they turned back to the saloon.

They found a part of the crowd had returned to the Full Hand, and the body of Ike Hurd was gone. But they looked in vain for the red-bearded or broken-nosed tough; Tom and Chet had vanished. Nor was Diamond Dion to be seen.

"Look here!" suddenly exclaimed Loyal, facing Yuma Yank; "that big sport was in this game against the girl!"

"W'at makes ye think so?" asked the miner, startled.

"He is not here."

"No."

"Well, he appeared behind the girl's pursuers."

"Yep."

"He managed to draw every one's attention while the toughs were getting in their work."

"That's so."

"And I heard the girl mutter that she believed him to be another one of her enemies."

"It looks like er dead straight case."

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"I dunno w'at ter think, pard; I'm all at sea."

While they were conversing both were startled by exclamations which came from the lips of several men near at hand. Turning toward the doorway, they were surprised to see a stranger who had just entered the saloon.

Well might they be surprised. The man was a perfect giant, being at least six feet and a half tall, his body built to correspond with his height. If this new-comer in the Full Hand had stood up beside Diamond Dion, he would have loomed three inches above the strange sport of the Devil's Mountains!

CHAPTER IV. A SINGULAR PAIR.

NEVER before had such a man appeared in Kicker's Bar, and murmurs of astonishment came from those gathered within the saloon.

"Holy heavens, what a man!"

"Wal, hain't he a Hercules!"

"I'll bet he's a terror on trucks!"

These and like exclamations were heard as the stranger stood surveying the throng.

The man's face was an attractive one to look upon, there being something pleasant and genial about it, even though there seemed a faint light of sadness deep back in his brown eyes, as if caused by some profound sorrow of the past. A curling blonde mustache shaded his lips, partially hiding their expression, but his square, firm chin denoted a man of determined character. His head was covered by a mass of dark yellow curls, so dark, indeed, they were almost brown. His dark-colored sombrero was pushed far enough back upon his head to reveal a high and broad expanse of forehead—an expanse which seemed to tell of an intellect fully on par with his magnificent body.

The stranger's clothes fitted his fine form to perfection, and they were made of the finest cloth. Although of the best quality and fit, the man seemed to adorn the clothes instead of the clothes adorning the man. The feature about them which first struck the observer's eye was that they were bound with silver braid. Both coat and vest were trimmed with the braid and a stripe ran down the legs of the pantaloons, the bottoms of which were lost within the long-legged, silver-spurred boots. Around the Mexican hat ran a silver chain. About his person there was not a weapon visible.

It was not strange that such a person should be stared at in wonder and admiration.

"Holy poker!" gasped Yuma Yank, clutching Loyal Kingdon's arm. "I reckon it's ole Samson his own self, I jest do, pard!"

"He is certainly a giant," acknowledged the Denverite; "and big men seem to abound to-night. Major Navrain is in the shade."

"Ther major is out o' it."

"Who is this silver-trimmed stranger?"

"Don't ax me; I never sot eyes on his like afore."

"He seems like a stranger in town."

"He is, I reckon."

Major Nepal Navrain had entered the saloon a few moments ahead of this Goliath, and the old soldier now hastened forward to greet the man who had just appeared.

"A stranger in town, I take it, sir?" ventured the major, his voice sounding a trifle off, and his right hand lightly touching his well kept beard.

"I am, sir," was the reply, spoken in a deep and musical voice.

"I thought so," bowed the major. "I am not a citizen of Kicker's Bar, but I did not remember of ever seeing you here before. Even though I do not belong in town, I am to be found here quite frequently. My ranch is a number of leagues to the northeast."

The unknown bowed.

"I trust you will make yourself perfectly at home in this town," continued the old soldier. "I am sure you will find the Bar a rustling little place and her citizens wide awake. They often boast of their hospitality and the manner in which they make strangers feel at ease, many of whom come here to stay—as the graveyard can attest."

The big man smiled, as he replied:

"I fancy this is like most Arizona towns—a pretty good place for one to mind his own business in."

"That it is; but I do not fancy you will be troubled by any one attempting to climb you. I did think I was well up in the world, but you throw me in the shade."

"W'at's ther matter with the major's voice?" muttered Yuma Yank. "Soun's like he hed a cold."

Major Navrain invited the stranger forward, and together they advanced to a position near the bar.

"Will you drink?" asked the old soldier.

"Without meaning the least offense, I must decline," was the quiet reply. "I never touch intoxicating liquor of any kind."

"That is all right," bowed the major. "Every man to his taste. I am inclined to indulge moderately now and then.—But, by the way of a better acquaintance, I am Nepal Navrain, and I held the commission of major in the Confederate Army at the close of the late war."

The stranger accepted the old soldier's extended hand, replying:

"I am Seth Culver, often called Silver-edged Seth on account of my little freak in dressing."

"I take it you are a sport?"

"Well—just a bit of one."

"A very sizable bit, I should say," smiled Navrain. "I sometimes play myself, but I am not on it to-night. However, if you are anxious for a game, you may be accommodated, for Diamond Dion is in town."

"Diamond Dion?"

"Yes; the Sport of the Devil's Mountains."

"A professional?"

"Well, he might be called that, though it is certain he is not obliged to play for a living."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He is taller than I by nearly three inches."

"Then I am not the only tall man in Kicker's Bar?"

"No; but you loom above all the others."

"Will you kindly describe Diamond Dion?"

The major did so, and Silver-edged Seth listened attentively, seeming to grow more and more interested as the ex-officer proceeded. When Navrain had finished, Seth said quietly, but in a stern manner:

"That is the very man I want to see. I have traveled two thousand miles to meet him."

"Then you know Diamond Dion?"

"I fancy we have met in the past."

"Well, you will be pretty sure to meet him if you remain in the Full Hand. He was here once this evening, but he departed at the time of a little broil, during which the lights were extinguished."

"The usual occurrence in a saloon fight."

"It is what is usually expected."

The major produced a case of cigars and offered Seth a choice. The giant accepted one and lighted it, Navrain following the example.

"What was the quarrel about?" inquired the Silver-edged Sport, as he carelessly watched the curling smoke.

Major Nepal hesitated about replying and seemed to dart a quick glance at the questioner, but the expression of the old soldier's eyes was quite concealed by the glasses he wore. At length, he slowly replied:

"It was over a girl."

The Giant Sport was seen to give a quick start.

"A girl?" his voice sounded unnatural and restrained.

"Yes," came carelessly from Navrain's lips.

"Rather a handsome one, at that."

"One of the young ladies of Kicker's Bar?"

"I never saw her here before, and, as I have said, I am a frequent visitor here."

"Who was she?"

"A fellow known as Taos Tom, whom I have seen in St. John's, Phoenix, San Carlos and other places, but never before in Kicker's Bar, claimed she was his daughter, but I do not put any stock in his claim, for the man is a ruffian of the worst type, and the girl appeared like a handsome and refined young lady."

"Kindly describe her."

The major did so, and as the Giant Sport listened, his cigar went out and his face was a study. It was plain he repressed his emotions, but the old soldier's words seemed to fill him with both satisfaction and uneasiness.

"Where are these men and this girl now?" he inquired.

"That is more than I can tell. I tried to keep track of them when the lights were extinguished, but I utterly failed. Diamond Dion was in the room at the time, and he seems to have vanished as mysteriously as the two ruffians and the fair maid."

Beneath his mustache-shaded lips Silver-edged Seth's teeth were tightly compressed.

"Did the people in this saloon believe the ruffian who claimed to be the girl's father?" the Sport inquired.

"Scarcely."

"What did the girl have to say for herself?"

"Said she had been kidnapped."

"And the ruffian denied it?"

"Both of them declared she was deranged."

A strange, hard smile flitted across Silver-edged Seth's face.

"Of course they lied."

The major promptly expressed that as being his opinion.

While they were thus conversing, they were approached by two more strangers in Kicker's Bar, and a strange pair they were indeed. They came forward arm-in-arm and paused in front of Nepal and Seth.

Two more illy-matched men it would have been hard to find. The taller man was not over five feet and ten inches, but his threadbare spring-bottomed pants were very tight and his shabby coat buttoned close about his slim, bony figure, which made him appear taller than he really was. But nothing could make him seem more angular than he was. His shoes were

badly worn, and a battered silk hat was canted rakishly on one side of his head. Still it was plain the man considered himself something of a dandy, for, although his cadaverous face sadly needed a shave, the crimson flower of a cactus was pinned upon the lapel of his Prince Albert coat.

The other was short, fat, round-faced, red-headed and jolly-appearing, for all of the shabby clothes he wore. He also wore a high hat, although his was not silk. In the day of its glory it had been white, but it was sadly soiled and battered.

"Gentlemen," said the cadaverous individual, speaking in a hollow, rasping voice, and striking an attitude, "you behold before your admiring eyes the firm of Scraggs and Shanks—"

"Shanks and Scraggs," quickly corrected the red-head.

"Well then, Shanks and Scraggs, authors, actors and poets. This gentleman with me is Robert Burns Scraggs, a poet who is destined to be known from one end of the universe to the other—one filled with the divine fire of poesy—one whose Muse is never coy—one whose Pegasus never limps. To look at him, you might not think him a poet, but could you hear some of his tender lines, your hearts would melt within you. Gentlemen, it is an untold honor to make the acquaintance of Robert Burns Scraggs."

This speech was accompanied with dramatic gestures and flourishes which made it decidedly ludicrous.

"Ahem!" and Robert Burns Scraggs cleared his throat with a sound that reminded one of the squawk of a choking hen. "The greatest honor which could be conferred upon you, gentlemen, is that of knowing the head of the firm of Shanks and Scraggs, which is my highly-esteemed companion, J. Wilkes Booth Shanks, the world-famous author and actor. In high tragedy, Mr. Shanks has no equal on the American stage. His interpretation of Shakespeare is acknowledged by both press and public to be the most marvelous ever known. He does not follow in the hackneyed ruts of the old drama, but has a style which is all his own, and is simply unapproachable. Gentlemen, the honor of your life, J. Wilkes Booth Shanks."

The actor bowed low, his hand upon his heart. Major Navrain turned somewhat impatiently upon the two strange individuals, demanding:

"What do you want?"

"Ah-ha!" cried Shanks, dramatically. "By the gods, that is the question!"

"To descend to the vulgar and commonplace," bowed Mr. Scraggs, "you bet your pile it is!"

"Well, speak out."

"We have journeyed far," explained the actor.

"And we have found it impossible to sustain life on Arizona air," added the poet. "Rare and delightful though it may be, it will not ward off the grim demon of hunger."

"Nor the fiend of thirst," hastily put in Shanks. "For many weary miles no wayside well did we behold."

"Nor didst greet our eager eyes some gushing fount of water pure and clear."

"And now this bar is reached, we find our purse bereft of coin bright an' dear."

"Hold on, friend! that was a rhyme with my closing word! You are encroaching on my line of business."

"Your pardon, sir, I humbly crave."

"A thing I ever freely gave. Ahem-m-m!"

Silver-edged Seth was forced to smile.

"You are not beggars, I hope?"

"No!" shouted the actor and the poet in a breath.

"If you befriend us, you shall be repaid," Scraggs hastily assured.

"I will repeat a selection from Shakespeare," declared Shanks, clearing his throat and striking an attitude. "Hamlet addressing the Queen:

"'Zounds! shew me what thou'lt do;
Would'st weep? would'st fight? would'st fast? would'st
tear thyself?
Would'st drink up Esil? eat a crocodile?
I'll do it.'"

"That quite expresses our dismal situation," affirmed the poet. "We are like sailors stranded upon a rock in the heart of a vast desert."

"Hem!" coughed Shanks. "There seems a slight incongruity about that simile."

"It was formed on the spur of the moment."

"In which case it should have been sharp."

"I was in a great hurry to get off the spur."

"That explains why you got off a bad simile."

"Well, I will follow it with a bit of impromptu rhyme:

"Good gents, I hope you'll pardon us,
Of late we've found no fountains;
We're not the m n to make a fuss
While traveling to Devil's Mountains.
Our thirst is great, our purse is low;
But, change will make you wonder
When we come back and treasure show:
And that we'll do—by thunder!"

The closing words seemed to astonish the poet himself as much as anybody else, but both poet and actor made a leap for the bar when they heard Silver-edged Seth tell the dispenser of drinks to give them what they desired.

CHAPTER V.

YANK AGREES TO GO.

"DID you hear that?" excitedly asked Loyal Kingdon.

"Hear what?" was Yuma Yank's calm inquiry. "I heard ther stuff thet derved red-headed jumpin'-jack got off."

"That is what I mean."

"Waal, w'at of it?"

"Didn't you notice what he said about the Devil's Mountains?"

"Cert."

"Well, that is what I mean."

"W'at wuz there 'bout thet as sh'u'd start ye in sech er way?"

"Those fellows are going there."

"As heaps o' fools hev afore 'em."

"But they spoke of a treasure they expect to find."

"Thet's w'at they all go arter, but they're mighty shore not ter find it."

"I believe they know something of the lost treasure of those uncanny peaks."

Yank looked at Loyal in a singular manner.

"Waal, they know more nor I do, then," he drawled. "But I reckon they're jest ther kind o' dad-derved idjits thet go cavortin' off inter ther mountains huntin' arter gold. Now, look at 'em. Ef they go thar, w'at chance w'u'd thar be fer them ter git back? Ef Devil Don didn't gobble 'em, a stray ban' o' 'Paches w'u'd be sart'in ter."

"Yank," said the young man, turning to his companion, "I have partially explained my reason for going to the Devil's Mountains, but I have not told what started me there. I will explain in a few words. I have a paper which came into my possession from an old Indian whom I had befriended. He could not read or understand it, and had never been able to find any one who could, as it was in a kind of cipher; but he was firmly convinced it held the secret of a great fortune. He was right, as I discovered after I had studied out the key to the cipher, which was very simple. It briefly told of a band of miners who had been hemmed into an old Aztec or Zuni ruin in the heart of the Devil's Mountains. They had a small fortune in nuggets and dust with them, but felt sure they were doomed. Their gold they secreted, and the paper was made out by one of the men who hoped it would reach the hand of a white man honest enough to send his share of the fortune, if it was ever recovered, to his poor old mother."

Loyal paused, and Yank uttered a queer grunt.

"How did ther copper-skin come by ther paper?"

"He did not tell me."

The old miner grunted again.

"You've got ther paper with ye?"

"Yes."

"Feel poorty sart'in it's ginoowine?"

"I do."

"Waal, mebbe it is; mebbe 'tain't."

"I have put enough confidence in it to come all the way from Denver for the purpose of going into the Devil's Mountains and making a search for the lost treasure."

"Boy, I reckon yer grit's er blamed sight better'n yer jedgment."

"You are almost too skeptical, Yank."

"I hain't er fish thet swallows ev'ry bait I see bobbin' fore my nose," was the reply. "I uster be token thet way, but sence I've got older I've l'arned better."

"I may be foolish," confessed Loyal; "but I am not the one to back out after I have started into anything of this kind."

"Waal, I like a stayer— So ye think thet mismated pair o' critters know suthin' o' this treasure?"

"It looks that way from the road."

"They may only hev heerd o' these other yarns thet are erfloat in these parts. P'raps they are goin' thar ter prospect."

"They do not look like prospectors."

"They look like greenhorns—tenderfeets."

After a moment of meditation, the Man from Denver said:

"I am going to try to find a chance to speak with them. If they are so free to tell where they are going, perhaps they may tell more."

"Mebbe."

After drinking, the actor and the poet were very profuse with their thanks.

"We are profoundly in your debt, kind sir," bowed Shanks, wiping his mouth on his coat-sleeve. "To repay you, I will give a choice selection from Othello, and Mr. Scraggs will deliver one of his finest poems. Are you ready?"

With this inquiry, the actor fell into an attitude of "offense," thumped his chest and cleared his throat.

"Hold on," smiled Silver-edged Seth. "I fancy neither Major Navrain nor myself cares to hear anything of the kind at present."

"Well, hardly!" declared the major.

Shanks and Scraggs looked at each other in dismay.

"Can I believe me ears?" gasped the actor.

"Alas, alas!" sighed the poet.

"Never again will I be able into the world's fair face to gaze."

"Those answers truly fill me with amaze."

"Can it be they really do not wish to hear?"

"I fear their answers make that point clear."

"My very soul is filled with deep despair!"

"Mine sweetness wastes on desert air."

"They'll never know how much they'll miss."

"They seldom have a chance like this."

"Their words are words that make me cry."

"I feel it were relief to die."

Having thus expressed themselves, the poet quickly adding a line that would rhyme to every line spoken by the actor, the two bowed low, again expressed their thanks and their regret at not being able to make repayment for what they had obtained.

"It is a wild, savage country, dear Shanks!" sighed the poet, as they turned away.

"Brother, thou hast spoken. It is wild and uncultured, and we can scarcely wonder such talents as ours are not appreciated. We must wait till we return to the world once more."

"Alas, the world has never given me the recognition my innermost soul tells me I deserve!"

"You are no worse off than I. The century is not enough enlightened to understand my original method of acting. I have spent many a harrowing night before uncultured audience who would insist in bombarding me with over-ripe hen-fruit."

"The time is coming when our genius will be recognized."

"I fear it will be after we are dead and beyond knowing anything of the world's tardy recognition."

"I fear so myself."

"But, soft! Within the bounds of those mountains to which we journey rests a treasure that shall give us wealth if not fame, for— Ah, I beg your pardon, sir."

Loyal had managed to place himself in the path of the strange pair, and Shanks had run full against the young man.

"Do not mention it," hastily spoke the Denverite. "It is of no consequence. Such a thing will frequently occur in such a crowd."

"By me faith!" cried the tragedian, with a broad sweep of his arm. "Here in this vast land of illiteracy and rudeness I have struck a gentleman! It is one of the seven wonders of modern times, methinks! Sir, I greet you."

Loyal promptly accepted the hand which J. W. B. Shanks held out.

"It is a rough country truly," he agreed. "But some of these rough men have tender hearts."

"Perchance that may be true," confessed the actor; "but never yet have I been able their bosoms to explore."

Then the poet broke in:

"A diamond in the rough
For some is good enough,
But we love the polished stone;
Of either have we none."

"Ah-a!" came from Shanks's lips, as he rested his left hand on his hip and waved his right toward his red-headed partner. "Dost hear that, noble sir? Those words came from the lips of one who is destined to make the whole world ring with his name. Allow me: my friend, Robert Burns Scraggs."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Scraggs," gravely assured the young Denverite, as he accepted the poet's extended hand. "My name is Loyal Kingdon, and I am from Denver."

"The pleasure is mutual and reciprocal, Mr. Kingdon," bowed the red-headed poet. "You have met us at an unfortunate time, but though of cash we have not much, we have grit to beat the Dutch. A-a-hem!"

"This gentleman with whom you have just clasped hands is J. Wilkes Booth Scraggs, the greatest living tragedian and original interpreter of the immortal Shakespeare."

"You have wandered into a strange part of the country for an actor and a poet."

"That is true," bowed Scraggs; "but we have an object. There is a golden magnet which drew us."

"Ah? Then our cases are identical. I was also attracted by a golden lure. I believe I heard you speak of the Devil's Mountains when you were at the bar. Are you traveling that way?"

"Yes—that is—well—ahem!—somewhat."

The actor had suddenly shot his partner a warning glance, and the red-headed poet became painfully confused.

"Then our courses may be identical for a time at least," observed Loyal, who had noted the glance and the sudden change in the rhyme-ster's manner.

"I fear not," Shanks hastened to say. "We are somewhat erratic in our wanderings, and are not apt to pursue any direct course, so I fancy you would find it anything but agreeable to travel in our company."

"You will require a guide."

"Are you able to guide us, dear sir?"

"No; but I fancy I know a man who is."

"I presume you would wish to accompany the party?"

"Well, I am thinking seriously of penetrating those mountains before long."

Again the poet and actor changed glances, and the latter said:

"I do not think you would care to travel with us."

Loyal saw the two had become suspicious of his purpose, and he realized it would be useless to try to pump them then. The more he questioned them the greater would grow their suspicions. He was baffled before he had gained a point further than that they were really going to the Devil's Mountains. That they had some powerful object in the move was apparent.

"You will find it difficult to obtain a guide, gentlemen," he said. "Those mountains are held in the greatest awe by nearly everybody in this section."

"Of that we have heard," bowed Shanks. "However, such information is rather pleasant to our ears than otherwise."

"Have you ever heard of Devil Don?"

"We have, but put no faith in such idle tales. We scarce believe such a creature exists."

"And if he did," put in the poet, "that would not daunt our courage."

"You are determined?"

"We are."

"Well, if all I hear of those mountains is true, the world stands a good chance of losing a wonderful actor and a great poet."

"We shall go armed and prepared to face and defeat the insidious foe."

Loyal was unable to learn anything more than that they were fully determined on going to the weird mountains of the Mogollon Range. They utterly refused to tell their object in going there.

Finally, the young man left them and joined Yuma Yank, who had been awaiting him at a table. The old miner looked up, with a single word:

"Waal?"

"They are really going to the Devil's Mountains."

"W'at fer?"

"On a treasure-hunt, without a doubt, though they suddenly became suspicious and declined to reveal their object."

"Waal, I s'pose thet makes ye think more'n ever thar's sump'n' in them thar mountains wu'th goin' arter?"

"No, it does not make me think so more than ever, for I was the same as fully convinced before. Yank, you must go with me."

"W'at?"

"You must go with me. You need not enter the mountains if you do not want to, but you must guide me to them."

The round-shouldered miner shook his head, muttering:

"I dunno—I dunno. I don't fancy even thet job."

"I will pay you the wages of a guide. If you would go into those mountains with me and stand by me through thick and thin, I would share the treasure with you, if it was found."

A strange look of indecision settled on Yank's face, but he finally asked:

"Hev ye fergot ther gal, pard?"

"No, I have not forgotten her. I shall not leave Kicker's Bar till I am sure she is safe or is not here. But I do not think we shall ever see her in this town again."

"W'y not?"

"Something tells me Diamond Dion has already carried her away."

"Then you think—w'at?"

"I think the strange man of the Devil's Mountains is that fair girl's enemy, as she suspected, and if he has caused her to be carried from this town, where should she be taken if not to the mountains where he has his home? Does it not look reasonable?"

"It duz, boy, it duz!"

"Yank, I am going to confess something: that girl's face impressed me strangely. I do not understand the strange spell her presence threw over me. If I were foolish, I should say I was in love with her; but I do not believe in love at first sight. All the same, I am ready to go to the end of the world to save her from harm, and I do not mean to rest till I know she is safe out of the grasp of her foes."

"Thunder! You hev got it, an' ye've got it bad!"

"Perhaps so. Now you can understand just how I feel. I am convinced she will be carried to the uncanny mountains, and I mean to follow and rescue her. I need a friend and pard. Yank, old man, are you with me?"

He gazed appealingly in the round-shouldered miner's eyes, as he asked the question. For a moment Yuma Yank hesitated, then he stretched out his hand, saying firmly:

"Fer ther gal's sake, I'm wid ye ter ther end. From this time we are pards through thick an' thin."

Their hands met in a grasp that sealed the compact.

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

"AN odd pair, those two," observed Major Nepal Navrain, as Shanks and Scraggs moved from the bar. "As strange a pair as I remember of seeing in a long time; and we see almost everything in this part of the country."

Silver-edged Seth relighted his partially-smoked cigar, and replied:

"They are certainly two strange characters."

But, this Diamond Dion of which you were speaking, where does he belong?"

"It is said he lives somewhere amid the Devil's Mountains, but no one seems to have discovered just where."

"How far are those mountains from here?"

"A hundred miles, at least. My ranch is over in that direction."

"Ah?"

"Yes. I pride myself I have one of the finest places in all Arizona. The grazing land is perfect and the building an old Mexican hacienda. But for an occasional desire to have a bout with the cards, I should be rarely seen in Kicker's Bar."

The Sport Goliath sent a ring of smoke curling toward the ceiling.

"Then you have that fever, have you?" he said. "That is the trouble with me. I do not fancy the title of gambler, but I cannot let the cards alone. If many people were in my place they would not want to, for I nearly always come out ahead. Not more than twice in all my life have I had a bad run of luck that held out through the entire sitting."

"You are more fortunate than I," confessed the major. "I have to limit myself or I would send every dollar I have in the world over the board. Cards make a very expensive amusement for me. For all of that, I am conceited enough to think it takes a good one to work any of the usual tricks on me. It is just my contrary luck that kills me."

"If I were not eager to get at this fellow you call Diamond Dion, I would invite you to indulge."

"I am glad you are looking for Dion, for I should not be able to decline, and it would probably cost me dear. However, till the Sport of the Devil's Mountains returns to the saloon, suppose we try our luck at the faro table?"

Seth hesitated and glanced toward the door, then he nodded.

"Well, I am agreeable, for I can draw out of that game at any time."

The two men attracted marked attention as they passed across the room to the faro lay-out.

"The major looks like er boy side of thet giant," muttered one fellow.

"But ef ther silver-trimmed sport hain't er Jim, ther major will swaller him," asserted another. "Navrain is allus tellin' how he's no good with ther pasteboards, but he 'most generally gits thar with both feet w'en he plays."

"They're goin' ter tackle faro."

Not a few spectators followed the two toward the faro table. When the table was reached the old soldier fell to talking with one of the citizens of Kicker's Bar, seeming to have something of importance to say to him and appearing to have forgotten faro for the time.

The Giant Sport took a seat at the table and purchased a hundred dollars' worth of chips. He had no thought of playing heavily and was only indulging to pass the time away and be doing something while he awaited the appearance of Diamond Dion.

His first bet was made on the knave, and he won. This he repeated three times in succession, winning every time.

Major Navrain had completed his business with the man whom he met, and he turned to watch the game.

"The knave seems to be a winner for you," observed the old soldier, seemingly having forgotten he intended taking a hand in the game.

"But you will have to change your lay this time. It is not at all likely that card will run against the bank four times in succession."

"It is against the laws of chance, I know," smiled Silver-edged Seth; "but for all that I am going to risk my entire winnings on the knave."

"Then copper it, man, copper it!"

"Nary copper, major. As far as I am concerned, the knave of hearts has always won in the game of life, and so I back it to win in this game of chance."

"But four times—man, you are crazy!"

"Wait and see."

The dealer continued to draw the cards from the silver box, until—

For the fourth time the knave fell on the side against the bank!

"Well, I swear!" exclaimed Major Nepal. "That is most remarkable! It is something that does not occur every day. Now, I suppose you will try a different lay?"

"At your suggestion, major, I will on the next deal. What shall it be?"

"The queen."

"The queen it is, but I have always found the queen treacherous and uncertain. She will smile on me at first only to play me false in the end. It is a card I always avoid at faro. At poker I will never open a jack-pot on a pair of queens, if one of them is the queen of hearts."

"I am afraid you are superstitious, partner."

"In that one line I am, major; I acknowledge the corn."

"Well, copper the queen to start with—play it to lose."

"At your suggestion, sir."

Silver-edged Seth placed the bet as suggested.

"I feel confident of winning at the start," he

smiled; "but if I stayed with that jade, she would pull every dollar I possess. She will try to bait me at first."

Sure enough, he did win.

"Dare you try it again?" asked Navrain.

"I will let the whole amount lay," said Seth, calmly. "If she does not swallow it this time, look out for the next."

But again he won on the "coppered" queen.

"By Jove! that card is a winner for you to-night!" cried Major Nepal, enthusiastically.

The giant shook his head.

"It looks that way," he confessed; "but you will see her begin to act contrary in a moment."

"Pull off that copper," suggested the old soldier, as Seth allowed his entire winnings to remain on the card.

The Sport Goliath shook his head.

"It stands this time."

"Great heavens, man! you have the most singular way of playing faro! I scarcely wonder you lose on the queen, if this is a sample of the game you usually play. You seem trying to throw your money away!"

Seth smiled.

Deliberately the dealer drew forth the cards. The Silver-edged Sport watched in an indifferent manner, but Major Navrain seemed unusually interested.

"Won it again, by Jove!"

The words fell from the old soldier's lips, as, for the third time, the queen came out a banker's card, and Seth's "copper" held the stakes.

"If that is not luck, I do not know my own name!"

"Shall I let the pile lay, major?"

"Yes; but for heaven's sake pull off the copper! Don't think that will run in that fashion four times in succession because the knave did. There is every chance in the world against it."

"All right, sir; this time I will take your advice. The whole pile remains—without the copper."

"And you are bound to win. Luck is with you to-night, and that is sure."

"It is an old saying that nothing is sure in this world but death and taxes."

The cards continued to drop from the box until the last queen came out. Major Navrain uttered an ejaculation of amazement, for it appeared a banker's card for the fourth time, and the stakes on the uncoppered queen went over the board.

"I hope to be hanged if I ever saw the beat of that!" burst from the veteran-officer's lips. "If you had let the copper remain, you would have been a four times winner."

"Did I not tell you the queen was a most treacherous card for me? You fully expected me to win that time; I fully expected to lose. That was the difference. I am not disappointed in the least, for I am still even with the bank. This is a game of amusement for me, and is not for boodle. I am simply waiting for a different lay, you know."

"If you are looking for something larger," said the dealer, "you are not likely to strike it in this saloon, to-night. We will lift the limit for you and give you all the sport you want."

This was said in a bantering, half-taunting tone that caused the major to straighten up as stiff as a stake and glare at the speaker, while Silver-edged Seth seemed scarcely to notice it, although he well knew the fling was made on account of the small amount of chips purchased at the start. Yet it was certain that table was run for the accommodation of players who sometimes purchased not more than a tenth as much.

"This is very satisfactory at present, sir," bowed the Giant Sport, tossing the remains of his well-smoked cigar into a cuspidore. "If you find my game too small for your liking, you are at liberty to shut down and cash what chips I have at any time."

"You ought to apologize, confound ye!" growled the major, still glaring at the dealer.

"It is of no consequence, major," smiled Seth, as he again placed a bet. "Are you coming in?"

"Not just now. I had rather watch you."

The Silver-edged Sport continued to play for some time, placing his bets as fancy and the run of the game dictated, but carefully avoiding the queen. He won almost steadily, his losings being only occasional, and of minor consequence.

Suddenly Major Navrain bent forward and whispered in his ear:

"Diamond Dion has just come in!"

The Giant Sport continued the play till the deal was closed, then he calmly pushed his chips forward to be cashed, being very deliberate in his movements, not having even turned his head.

Receiving the money, Seth carelessly tucked it into his pocket and arose from the table. He turned, and—

The two sports were face to face!

CHAPTER VII.

CALLING BACK THE PAST.

DIAMOND DION was seen to start back, a low exclamation of dismay breaking from his lips, and his dark face turning pale. Silver-edged Seth gazed accusingly into the face of the man he confronted.

The tableau was a striking one.

"Them two hev met afore!" muttered Yuma Yank, who was a witness of the scene.

"That is plain enough," agreed Loyal Kingdon. "Look at their faces!"

The faces of the two men were studies. Fear and defiance were written on that of the Diamond Sport, while Silver-edged Seth's usually pleasant features were corrugated with passion. The hands of both men were clinched, and at that moment they resembled nothing so much as two monster lions, rivals of the jungle.

A sudden hush fell on those within the saloon, a feeling of awe filled the breast of nearly every witness of the strange tableau. What was about to happen?

The two men stood like blocks of carved stone—stood till the suspense became painful.

Which would speak first?

Silver-edged Seth was the man.

"I have found you!"

The words were spoken deliberately, but they set the blood tingling in the veins of many a man who heard them. There was an indescribable deepness, an intensity, a suppressed fierceness about them that told of the hidden fury in the giant's heart.

Diamond Dion bowed.

"You have."

His voice was steady, but singularly hoarse and unnatural. After that first start and paling, he exhibited no further signs of fear or dismay.

"You know why I have come."

"I suppose so."

"I want her."

"You can never have her!"

With two strides, the Silver-edged Sport reached the other, and clutched him by the shoulders, glaring straight into his eyes. Not till then did the spectators observe how much the two men looked alike, though one was dark-complexioned and the other light.

"They are brothers!" softly asserted Yuma Yank.

"I will have her!" came from the lips of the light-haired giant. "You stole her from me, but you shall give her up!"

"Have you been waiting all these years, Seth Culver?" demanded Diamond Dion. "It was seventeen years ago she left you."

"Bah! Did you think I meant that woman?"

"What other one could you mean?"

"You know well enough! But for your second act I never would have troubled you."

"You speak in riddles."

Seth Culver drew back one huge fist as if he would smite the other in the face, his blue eyes blazing with an awesome light. The spectators caught their breath, fully expecting the blow; but Diamond Dion did not quail.

"Strike!" exclaimed the Sport of the Devil's Mountains—"strike! It will then be your life or mine!"

The giant's hand fell by his side.

"The time has not come," he hoarsely declared. "First, your lips must tell me what you have done with my child. I do not ask for the other. She is nothing to me now—she is forever banished from my heart! It is my child I want."

"Your child?"

"Yes; the one you stole from me. Do not open your lips to deny it, for it is useless. I have followed you here to this wild land to recover her, and I will have her—or your life!"

"Are you demented?"

Again that look of fury flashed over the face of the light-haired giant, and again his clinched hand was lifted. By this time Major Navrain seemed to consider it his duty to interfere.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he cried. "Go slow, go slow!"

That seemed to recall Silver-edged Seth to his senses. He lowered his hand, saying:

"There are too many around. This is no fit place to settle this affair."

Dion bowed.

"Shall we go out?"

"Yes."

"Major Navrain," said Seth, "I trust you will see we are not followed?"

"I certainly will, sir," assured the old soldier.

Diamond Dion led the way, and the Silver-edged Giant followed at his heels. Thus they passed out of the saloon, leaving a wondering crowd behind.

Not till they were some distance from the saloon did they halt, then the Man from the Devil's Mountains turned with the question:

"What was that you were saying about your child? I am afraid I did not understand you, brother."

"Brother!" burst from Seth's lips. "Gods! Do you dare call me that after what has happened? Have a care, Valois Culver! I deny the tie!"

The moon was half-hidden behind distant peaks, but its light was sufficient to reveal their attitudes.

"As you please," bowed the man known in Kicker's Bar as Diamond Dion.

Why should I acknowledge you as a brother?" cried Seth. "Have you not proved the most dastardly and treacherous of enemies? You struck a blow straight at my heart—at my life!"

Had you struck me with a knife it would not have been worse! And now you dare call me brother! For God's sake, do not do it again! I do not want your blood on my hands! Had I wanted it, I should have trailed you down years ago—trailed you down and killed you!"

"I have been expecting you."

"Expecting me—ah, you have not lived in happiness! The knowledge of your treacherous act has brought some bitterness into your life! I knew it would. And Agnes—she, too, has been punished by her conscience! I know it!"

"You were false to her."

Once again Silver-edged Seth clutched the other by the shoulder.

"False! It is a lie, black as hell! Never woman had truer husband! If you value your life, Valois, have a care of your words! I have endured much, but I cannot endure everything. There is a limit beyond which even you cannot go. I am naught but a human being with human passions."

Diamond Dion seemed in no way alarmed by the outburst of the other.

"If it were not true, why didn't you follow us—why not try to hunt us down?"

Seth's hand fell from the Diamond Sport's shoulder and he retreated a step, folding his powerful arms over his heaving breast.

"Follow you—my God! was I not tempted? Did I not long to slay you both—to see you lying dead at my feet? Was not the fury of a madman upon me? Night after night I walked the streets, unable to close my eyes in sleep. Day after day I spent in prayer that the Merciful God above would take the burning thirst for vengeance out of my heart. I suffered agonies sufficient to drive a man less strong to insanity or suicide—or murder! I lived in a hell on earth!"

The man's feelings took such possession of him at that moment that he seemed torn by every word he uttered. Still Diamond Dion appeared unmoved.

"You brought it on yourself, Seth."

"How?"

"By proving false to the woman you made your wife."

"In what way did I prove false to her? Speak out! Tell me that!"

"It is useless to review those things. We were rivals before you proved the winner, but you threw up the game through your own folly. I was winner in the end."

"And you dare taunt me with this! Man, where is your heart!" Then suddenly seeming to lose all control of himself, he snatched out a revolver, grating:

"Yes, where is your heart? My bullet shall find its black core!"

He thrust the weapon fairly against Dion's breast, the pressure of his finger on the trigger causing the hammer to rise somewhat.

The Diamond Sport stood on the threshold of death!

With a nerve that was simply marvelous, the threatened man did not quail. Calmly he looked his brother in the face, his lips parting to say:

"You have found it. Press the trigger, and your bullet will pass straight through it."

For almost half-a-minute they stood thus; then the drawn revolver fell at Silver-edged Seth's side and he staggered back, pressing his left hand to his forehead.

"It is the old madness!" he whispered, his eyes rolling strangely. "It is the madness I felt in those dark days and darker nights when I first knew she was gone—gone from me forever! It held possession of me for a moment—it is trying to gain control of me now! I fought it off."

He turned his eyes upward, crying brokenly:

"Oh, God, take this horrible temptation from me! Give me strength to resist it, Father in Heaven—give me strength!"

He thrust the weapon back into its accustomed place.

"If I kept it in my hand I should use it," he murmured. "I cannot kill him, and I must not kill myself. I have another to live for."

Diamond Dion half-turned away, his hands clinched for an instant as if he too were trying to gain control of himself; but his face was cold and stern. Either he was a man of an iron heart, else he had a most remarkable ability to restrain his emotions.

"Valois."

"What is it, Seth?"

"She—she does not—not regret?"

"I do not know as I understand you."

"It must be she loved you—better than she did—me. If not, she would not have—left me all alone. She is alive—well?"

"Yes."

"Happy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, God!"

It was a groan of anguish that came from the depths of a strong man's heart.

The moon was sinking behind the peaks and the shadows growing deeper; but the shadows of darkest midnight were as naught compared with the shadows which shrouded one man's soul.

Finally, Seth Culver straightened up.

"It must be right for it to be so," he murmured, "for it is my belief that whatever is is right."

The thought of her being happy struck hard at my heart for a moment, but now I am glad. It was a terrible mistake—our marriage. I believe she loved you most all the time, but she did not know her own heart. If that is true, then it is not strange she is happy with you. I have no right to complain."

He bowed his head on his breast and stood thus for several moments. Dion came forward and laid a hand on Seth's arm, but it was instantly flung off, and the Goliath started back, hoarsely crying:

"Don't touch me! You will arouse me again, and then Heaven only knows where I shall stop! I have restrained myself far more than I once thought I could in your presence, but my heart is still hot within me!"

The words which had risen to Dion's lips were driven back by this outburst, and once more he stood speechless.

"My greatest regret," spoke Seth, with painful deliberation, "is that I was forced to meet you at all. Now that I know where you are to be found, I may be controlled by some mad impulse at any time. You could not hide from me in the Devil's Mountains, even though Satan himself aided in secreting you! But I do not want to go to those mountains."

"You must not!"

"Ah! you fear I shall meet her! That is the last thing I should desire now. But why were you not content in robbing me of the woman I loved? why should you steal from me the child who had partially filled the place she left so vacant in my heart? That child is now all the world to me! What have you done with her? Speak the truth as you value your life, Valois Culver!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DIAMOND DION SLIPS AWAY.

STERNLY the words came from the giant's lips as he once more gazed straight into the dark face of the Diamond Sport. The increasing shadows hid the expression on that face, but Dion lifted one hand in a protesting gesture. He opened his lips to speak, but Silver-edged Seth interrupted:

"Do not say it, Valois! The denial is useless, for the note left was in your hand. You were bold enough then, for you fancied you had successfully hid from me for seventeen years and you could continue to do so. Why you should hate me so for winning Agnes Norwood I cannot understand—I mean I cannot understand why you should continue to hate me. You made your hatred plain enough in the old days, and you swore you would make me sorry I was successful. You kept your word, and that should have satisfied your passion. This second blow, if possible, is more dastardly than the first!"

The Man of the Devil's Mountains waited patiently till the other had finished, then he spoke with deliberation:

"I have said I did not understand you; I repeat it. You speak of your child. Did you marry again?"

"No."

"No? Then what is this child you mention?"

"A waif of the streets—a child of misfortune."

"But you spoke of her as your child."

"And my child she is, for nine long years she has been mine. She is everything to me, for she fills the place a child of my own might have occupied had Agnes proved faithful to her vows."

"Do not speak of faith while you—" Dion checked himself abruptly and seemed to make an effort to gain control of his passions. The taller man regarded him grimly, having once more folded his arms across his broad breast.

"Then the one you speak of is an adopted child?"

"Yes; but she is none the less dear for that reason. She loves me as if I were her real father, and I love her with the tenderness of a parent. I would shield her from the slightest harm—I would place my life between her and misfortune! We were happy together. I saw her growing to become a beautiful and talented young lady. I gave her an education; I gave her a home; I gave her the best associates. I tried to make her forget she was a child of poverty and misfortune and dependent upon me for all she possessed—but she never forgot. In her bosom beat a true and loyal little heart. It was cruel to have her snatched from me—that was the most heartless blow of all, Valois!"

"What if I should tell you I know nothing of this child? What if—"

"I have asked you not to do so. I trust you will not arouse me again by persisting. You must give her up! I have come for her, and she will return with me."

"And if I will not give her up—what?"

"I shall kill you, Valois!"

The words were quietly spoken, but there was a world of unaltering determination in them. Diamond Dion seemed puzzled and uncertain, and well might he be!

"You must now comprehend how much this child is to me," continued Seth. "I first saw her selling papers on the streets. Her clothes were in rags, but she had a pair of eyes taken from the liquid blue of heaven! Her hair was like a tangled mass of sunbeams. I was struck by

her appearance at once, and every day I bought papers of her. Sometimes I bought her whole stock and gave them back to her. I gained her confidence, and then I questioned her about herself and how she lived. She told me her father was dead and her mother was not very well. They lived in a wretched alley far up in the attic of a ramshackle building. I would have gone there to see the child's mother, but she told me I must not, for her mother would not see visitors. In telling me where they lived she had thoughtlessly broken a promise to that proud but poverty-cursed mother. That was the way I found the child who has since become so much to me."

He paused a moment, then continued:

"One day I missed my little one from the street. I looked for her in vain. The following day was rainy, but for four long hours I searched in vain for my Little Blue-eyes. She did not come to me; I could not find her. I was tempted to try to find her in the wretched alley, but my promise not to go there kept me away till another day. But when she still failed to appear, I sought the alley, I found the old building, I climbed the dirty, winding stair. The room was reached, and I found my little one lying on a bed of straw by the side of her dead mother."

"That was how I found my child, Valois. What followed you may surmise. From that day her home was with me. She no longer sold papers in the streets; life became a different thing to her."

"I will not weary you by telling how she wound herself around my shattered heart. That heart was wretched; she brought it sunshine. As far as she was capable, she filled the lonely place in my bosom. Before she became mine, I often thought I had nothing to live for and was a fool for existing. After that, I decided there was still something good and sweet and true in this wide land of deception and treachery."

"Thus we lived till a little while ago. Then you came and took her from me. I was away from home at the time, else you never could have done it and escaped. I only discovered the truth when I returned. Then I struck the trail, and—I am here."

Diamond Dion had listened patiently. He now spoke again:

"I think I have seen this girl. If I am not mistaken, she was in the saloon yonder this very evening. Two men—one of whom claimed to be her father—pursued her in there!"

"Your tools!" grated the Giant Sport, his passions apparently rising again. "And to think she is in the hands of such dogs! That enrages me as much as anything else. But you must lead me to her, Valois!"

"I can not."

"You shall!"

"Seth, you talk like a deranged person. You will not hear what—"

"I will not hear your lies! Is it strange I will not believe you? You have proved yourself anything but an honorable man. Now that I have trailed you down, you still hold out with your bold-faced game. Are you afraid to lead me to the child? Do you fear that when I have found her I will take revenge on you? I will not. All I ask is that you forever keep from crossing my path again. You have my promise; take me to my child."

"You do not ask much!" and the Silver-edged Sport fancied the words were spoken sneeringly. "You only demand more than I am able to perform! You will not hear a word of explanation, yet you say you will kill me if I do not take you to the girl at once. All right. I am ready. Go ahead with you—"

The spiteful crack of a revolver interrupted the words, and a bullet sung past Silver-edged Seth's head. The giant was untouched, but it was a close call, indeed.

Seth's hand fell on a revolver, as he whirled toward the point from which the shot had seemed to come. With the weapon in his hand, he stood staring toward the darker shadows near a cluster of cabins, ready to make instant reply should the unseen enemy repeat the treacherous act.

"The bullet was meant for me, that is plain," he muttered; "but I can not tell just where it came from. If I could—Ha! Was that a skulking figure?"

He fancied he saw a dark figure flit past one of the cabins and disappear, but even had he felt certain he was right, he could not have been sure the man was the one who fired the cowardly shot.

For two or three minutes he stood gazing toward the cabins, but his watch was unrewarded. The shot was not repeated. At length he turned back.

Diamond Dion was gone!

CHAPTER IX.

BOUND FOR THE UNCANNY MOUNTAINS.

THE discovery amazed the Silver-edged Sport, for he had not heard a sound of Diamond Dion's retreat.

"Gone!" he exclaimed, almost incredulously.

He gazed around in the vain hope of seeing the man close at hand. The Mysterious Man of

the Devil's Mountains had vanished as completely as if silently swallowed by the earth. The giant saw no skulking figure in swift retreat, no crouching form seeking concealment in the denser shadows.

"What better proof of his guilt could I have?" hoarsely muttered the tricked Goliath. "If he was guiltless, why didn't he stay and prove it? He was guilty, and he has crept away like a dog—a miserable dog!"

He stamped upon the ground in impotent rage, grinding his strong white teeth.

"Why did I spare him? What restrained me when the muzzle of my weapon was over his heart and my finger pressing the trigger? Something held me back then, I could not destroy him. Yet, would it not have been justice had I allowed a bullet to plow its way through his false heart—his treacherous black heart? And is that man my brother? God! Can it be the same mother bore us both?"

The giant's fury was something awesome to look upon, and the working of his powerful face would have terrified a person with weak nerves. His eyes fairly blazed in the growing gloom. Slowly he lifted the revolver in his hand and gazed at it like one dazed.

"What made me draw it?" came hoarsely from his lips. "Have I had it in my hand ever since I pressed the muzzle against his breast? No, no! Some one fired at me—but who? Was it not a friend of his? It must have been, and that gave him the chance he wanted to escape. Oh, Heaven have mercy! I feel the mad fire surging in my veins once again—the terrible desire to kill—kill—kill! Once I crushed it back and restrained myself; I must do so again!"

There, all alone in the almost deserted street, Seth Culver fought a stern and savage battle with his own passions. Wronged and betrayed by his wife and his own kin, he still sought to keep the brand of Cain from his brow.

Finally, he seemed to conquer, and for several minutes he stood with his head bowed on his breast. He seemed the mammoth statue of a sentinel sleeping at his post of duty.

Suddenly, he started and stretched his hands upward, hoarsely crying:

"Oh, my God! how long, how long?"

It was a prayer that came from the bottom of his heart.

The revolver was returned to its usual place, and again he began to look for the man who had so silently given him the slip. He moved along the street, looking right and left into the shadows of the cabins. Once or twice he saw moving figures, but investigation revealed none of them was the one he was looking for. His search was fruitless, and he was forced to give it up after he had thoroughly scoured the little town.

"I knew I should not find him," he muttered, halting in a dejected attitude. "After being cunning enough to give me the slip, he is too cunning to be easily found again. But I will find him, even if he leads me into the very heart of Satan's dominion! The depths of the pit shall not him from me! Though all heaven and earth combine to secrete him, I will find his place of concealment! And when I have found him—what?"

That was a question Seth Culver himself could not answer. When he had found this man who had so bitterly wronged him, what would he do?

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

It seemed as if a voice had whispered the words into his ears. He started and looked around, but he was alone. He felt his heart give a great throb in his breast, and a sob broke from his lips.

"Oh, Agnes, Agnes, my darling! I thought I had put you from my heart forever, but this night has awakened the old passion. It was only slumbering; it was not dead. And you are happy—he said so! Great Heaven above! Are you the woman I thought I married? Is your heart the same, or has it utterly changed? Happy—happy after your falseness! happy with him! And you must be beautiful still, for it is plain you have kept his love. Beautiful—you must be more beautiful in your maturity than in your younger days! Agnes, Agnes, Agnes! My heart yearns for you! my eyes are eager to look upon you!"

It was a strange and awesome thing, the powerful passion that rocked the very soul of this giant. It was the most powerful thing in the world for either good or evil—LOVE! For the sake of this strange thing which no living man can analyze, great and noble deeds have been performed; for the sake of this strange thing, great and startling crimes have been committed. Love—a goddess at the feet of which the whole world kneels! Love—a beautiful creature we may enjoy while we lightly touch and caress it, but which fades and withers in our arms the closer we press it to our breasts!

For a long time the man stood with his hands clinched and his gigantic frame atremble. Once or twice he sought to mutter his thoughts aloud, but something in his throat choked and broke them. At last, with a hoarse gasp, he flung out his open hands, as if thrusting something from him.

"It is not mine to possess ever again! All I have left is the child. Even she is torn from me for the present, but I will find her again—I will! Of course he will carry her into those moun-

tains where he makes his home, and I will have to follow. My little Lois must be saved, even though I am forced into the path of temptation and distress in finding her. I hope God will keep Agnes from my sight! I cannot bear to look on her again! No, I cannot bear it, even though my very soul thirsts for the sight! Sometimes I dream of her—dream it is as it was long, long ago. We are living together, happy, happy! No footstep of sorrow has left its mark upon our threshold; the world lays bright and smiling before us! She comes and kneels beside me—her eyes look up into mine—I feel her touch, and then—I wake! I awake and find it all a dream—find myself lying dazed in the darkness of the night! Such an awaking is worse than death!"

He walked a few steps toward the main portion of the town, having paused on the outskirts. Once more he halted.

"I must go back to the saloon," he said. "When I enter they must not read by my face what has passed since I left with Valois Culver. For seventeen years I have played a part before the world, and while life continues I must still play that part. Few have dreamed of my secret. My manner has deceived all around me; it must continue the same."

He seemed to make an effort to regain control of his shaken nerves, and after a time he succeeded. Then he walked deliberately back and entered Full Hand Saloon.

Major Navrain came forward as soon as Seth appeared.

"Ah, sir, you are back. I have been looking for you. But, the other—"

"Did not see fit to return," came quietly from the giant's lips.

"Great Moses, man!" gasped the major. "You have not—you did not—I heard a shot!"

"I did not fire it, sir."

"Then the trouble did not end seriously?"

"It did not come to bloodshed."

"Well, I am glad of that. It may seem strange to you, but, although I am an old soldier, I cannot bear bloodshed. I always avoid trouble of any kind when I can. I carry weapons, but I rarely have need to use them."

"It is well you carry them," asserted Seth, forcing a smile. "You have probably heard the saying that a man might never want a gun in the West, but if he ever did want one, he was sure to want it mighty bad."

"Which is quite true. But how long do you think of remaining in Kicker's Bar?"

"Till morning."

"Your stay will be brief, indeed. I shall leave in the morning, for I have business which calls me south. Which way do you go?"

"Toward Devil's Mountains."

"Indeed?"

"At least, that is what I think now, and there is little chance that morning will bring an alteration in my plans."

"You have something that calls you that way?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am sorry I am not ready to return to the ranch, for that is directly in your road. However, you must go there and accept my hospitality, even though I am not present. You will probably reach it the second day from Kicker's Bar. One of my cowboys shall accompany you as escort and guide."

"Your kindness—"

"Now, do not mention it, dear sir. I wish to send Gila Jack back to the ranch with a message, and so it will not trouble me in the least. You will have company, and he will show you the most direct course to the mountains you wish to reach. That should settle it."

"I suppose we shall have to say it does, but—"

"But what takes you to those mountains? If you will pardon the question."

"Business, major."

"Have you ever heard the tales they tell of those haunted mountains?"

"I have heard some of them."

"And I suppose you put no faith in them?"

"Well, I must confess they do not seem very credible."

"Yet some of them are true."

"Really?"

The old soldier bowed.

"I do not often have much to say about those mountains," he declared; "for I do not wish to be considered superstitious, but if my ranch was located five hundred miles further from them, I should value it more highly."

"Why?"

"Well, there are things about those barren mountains I do not understand. I suppose you have heard of Devil Don?"

Seth bowed.

"I hear more of him the nearer I approach to those mountains."

"Which is not to be wondered at. Such a creature exists, for I have seen him."

"I am growing interested. It happens you are the first whom I have met that claims to have seen this Demon. What is he like?"

"He is the most hideous creature I ever saw. In the first place he dresses in bright scarlet and is hunch-backed. But it is not his figure that is

the most horrible, it is his face. A more repulsive face I never saw. One eye is gone, leaving nothing but the empty socket; the other is unsteady and full of fire. His teeth are yellow tusks which protrude from his mouth and give him a terrible aspect. That is about all I can tell you concerning him, for those are the things which riveted my attention."

"Well, I should say they were enough to rivet any one's attention. I suppose you believe this creature human, major?"

"Human—of course he is! By that I mean there is nothing supernatural about him. He may be inhuman as far as his instinct goes, but I reckon that is all."

"You have formed an opinion of him?"

"I will tell you exactly what I believe, sir: I think that creature is the chief of a band of marauders and cattle-thieves."

"What makes you think so?"

"I have my reasons. There are a band of men who have been working in various parts of the Territory, and no organized attempt has ever been successful in running down the rustlers. They always manage to escape in some manner."

"And you think these rustlers have their retreat in the Devil's Mountains?"

"I do. I think the horrible appearance of this creature called Devil Don is a great thing for them, as it keeps people out of those mountains. As long as miners and others are afraid to venture into the barren range, the retreat of the rustlers is secure."

"Have you ever been troubled by the cattle-thieves?"

"Only once. I fancy they have a purpose in leaving me alone. They know I have no particular fear of their Devil, and if I could get enough men to go with me, I would penetrate those mountains and rout 'em out. They do not wish to stir me up too much."

"That looks reasonable. And if they let you alone, they probably think no one will suspect their retreat is in those reputedly haunted mountains."

"Correct. There are some who think Diamond Dion knows more about the mystery of the mountains than he would care to tell."

Seth gave a slight start, as a new thought flashed over him. Was it not possible the Diamond Sport was at the bottom of it all? Had not he devised the scheme of the Demon that those who might find his retreat would be kept away through fear? It looked reasonable.

For some time Seth and Major Navrain conversed, and when they separated, the old soldier again expressed regret at not being able to accompany the Goliath in the morning.

"I would go with you into the very core of those mountains," he declared. "If I get back in time, you may see me there, anyway. I do not suppose you could delay the move two days? In that time I would be ready to accompany you."

"It will be impossible."

"Well, Gila Jack will be ready to act as your guide in the morning."

Shortly they parted.

As Silver-edged Seth left the saloon he was closely followed by Yuma Yank and Loyal Kingdon. When they were fairly outside, Yank ventured to address the giant.

"I say, Pard Silver-edge."

Seth wheeled at the word.

"Well, sir?"

"We want ter chin with ye er leetle, an' we won't bother ye long."

"Then, speak on."

"I heerd ye tell ther major ye wuz goin' ter ther Devil's Mountains?"

"Well?"

"Wasl, we're boun' thar, too—me an' my pard, hyer."

"Is that true?"

"Straight goods, pard."

"You are not afraid of the Demon?"

"Mebbe so; mebbe not. Anyhow, we're goin', Demon ur no Demon."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Yuma Yank, miner, prospector an' ginerel vagabond. This hyer young feller's Loyal Kingdon, frum Denver."

Seth came closer and looked searchingly into their faces, the light above the door of the saloon revealing their countenances to his earnest gaze.

"I know w'at ye're thinkin', pard," hastily asserted Yank. "I don't blame ye er dernel bit fer bein' s'picious, but we are clean white. I reckon Yuma Yank hes bin heerd of in Kicker's Bar, but ef you can fine er galoot as'll say he ever heerd he wuz anythin' but squar', I'll swaller my boots!"

There was something about the old fellow's manner that seemed to convince Seth, for he asked:

"What do you want?"

"Want ter go 'long with ye. I reckon three'll make er stronger team then one ur two. We've got business in them mountains, an' we're goin' thar."

After questioning them a few minutes more, the giant held out a broad hand to each, saying: "We are pards for the trip into Satan's domain."

And seemingly from the air above their heads a voice was plainly heard to say:

"If you enter the Devil's Mountains, you will never return! Beware!"

CHAPTER X.

OLD YANK'S WONDERFUL FEAT.

FOUR men had halted for the night beside a small creek which flowed into one of the tributaries of the Salt River. With the exception of a halt during the hottest period, they had been traveling all day beneath a cloudless dome of intense, glittering blue, from which the sun sent down its scorching rays, and both the men and their weary horses were glad of the rest.

Along the borders of the stream grew a mass of post-oaks, pecans and other trees of a stunted variety, and all were covered by a tangled mass of vines which bore the brightest of scarlet-hued flowers.

The grass which grew near the stream was well adapted to allay the hunger of the horses, and the animals having been picketed in favorable positions, they were rapidly satisfying their desires.

A small fire had been built, and by the light of this the four men partook of the "grub" with which they had provided themselves before leaving Kicker's Bar. They were Silver-edged Seth, Yuma Yank and Loyal Kingdon, the cowboy, Gila Jack, accompanying them.

The cowboy was a short, wiry fellow with a crooked nose and a pair of beady, restless eyes. His face was not a very attractive one, to say the least.

"Waal," drawled Yank, wiping his mouth with his sleeve as he finished eating, "I'll 'low I feel better, heap sight. Now I propose ter take er smoke."

He produced a very black pipe and a plug of still blacker tobacco. The stem of the pipe he thrust into his mouth, while he began to whittle off little chunks of tobacco with a huge clasp-knife, finally rubbing it between his horny hands and crowding it into the bowl of the pipe. Then the glowing end of a firebrand served as a match.

"Don't reckon I'm lazy," mumbled the veteran, as he rolled over upon an elbow, his head supported in the palm of his hand, "but it's a sort o' natteral languidness thet's ther matter with me. A day's jaunt like this yar' one jest makes me awful tired."

Silver-edged Seth stared moodily into the fire, not seeming to notice anything around him. Gila Jack took a huge chew of "the weed," while Loyal picked his teeth with a bit of wood he had whittled to a point.

"Jolliest crowd I never struck, b'gash!" mumbled Yank. "It's as jolly as er funeral, an' thet's er fac! Jest looker ther faces on 'em! I reckon it'd take er mighty strong joke ter raise er snicker hyer."

As no one offered to speak, the old miner continued:

"Thet thar word *strong* made me think o' ther time I 'stonished ther people up in Denver. I wuz takin' in thet town w'en I kem ter whar some galoots wuz 'scussin' who c'd kerry ther greatest number o' bricks up a ladder ter ther top o' er five-story ranch they wuz buildin'. Thar wuz an Irishman thar they said c'd kerry twenty-four brick clean ter ther top, an' another thet said he c'd kerry *forty-eight*! Waal, I lissened ter their talk fer er while, then I offered ter bet I c'd kerry *seventy-five* brick clean ter ther top o' ther buildin'. They laffed at me, an' thet made me mad. I offered ter bet ten ter one, an' er feller he took me. I putt up ev'ry derned cent I had in ther worl', then I tole 'em ter brung on their mottar an' pack in ther bricks so they w'dn't spill. They done it, b'gash! Now, d'yer s'pose I kerried them brick up?"

"Such a feat was impossible," asserted Loyal. Yank gave a contemptuous grunt.

"Thet's all *you* know 'bout it!" he said, shortly. "I jest stooped over an' gaffled ter them yar brick. It wuz er poorty good lift ter start with. Ther ladders wuz hitched one top o' t'other right straight up fer ther hull five stories, an' they were derned nigh puppendicular. I started up them ladders with all ther crowd hootin' roun' ther bottom, fer they 'lowed I w'dn't git very fur. But I jest kep' peggin' right erlong, though I will confess them brick begun ter bear down powerful hard by ther time I reached ther secon' story. Still I hung ter it like er hungry dorg ter a bone, an' I kep' er goin' higher. The crowd stopped their yellin' an' stared up at me with their mouths wide open. They still thought I wuzn't goin' ter leave ther brick at ther top, but I jest did."

"Then you won the wager?"

"Yep. But I met with er leetle axcident. Jest as I reached next ter ther last rung o' ther ladder, an' wuz almost ready ter step off, ther pesky thing bruck."

"The rung?"

"Yep."

"Did you fall?"

"Fall! I kem down thet ladder tippety-tap, tippety-tap, tippety-tap clean ter ther bottom, and I bruck ev'ry blamed spoke out ez fast ez my feet struck 'em! Fact, b'gash! Ther bottom o' ther ladder wuz on hard groun', but I went inter

ther groun' clean up ter my knees w'en I struck. Thet's w'at makes me so roun'-shouldered. It kinder humped me over."

"I should have thought it would! But didn't you say you left the bricks at the top? It almost seems as if you have cut your fingers, Yank."

"Not by er derned sight!" snorted the old man. "Ther crowd fetched er yell, an' at thet I jest jumped up an' run up thet thar ladder like er cat, 'thout even stoppin' ter ketch my breathe. I kerried ther brick clean ter ther top thet time."

"But I thought you said you broke every rung out of the ladder! How in the world did you get up?"

"Shinned up ther side-poles, dad-blame it!" returned the old miner, thoroughly disgusted. "How'd ye think I got up—took er balloon? Did ye think I went up on ther elevator? Did ye s'pose I h'isted myself with er derrick? P'r'aps you don't believe I went up a tall? Waal, I don't keer w'at you believe!"

With this outburst, the veteran rolled over upon the blanket he had spread, and whenever he was spoken to after that for a long time, he would only grunt.

Loyal laughed immoderately at the conclusion of Yank's story, and Seth was forced to join in, but it was evident Gila Jack failed to see anything amusing about it, for he did not even smile. And although the aged miner seemed utterly unconscious of the manner in which the end of the tale of a wonderful feat was received, he was covertly watching the cowboy out of the corners of his eyes.

Yank was not favorably impressed by the appearance of Gila Jack; it was his thus far unexpressed opinion that the cowboy would bear watching. And the old miner was an excellent judge of human nature.

Gila Jack lay gazing into the sinking fire, now and then sending a volley of tobacco-juice upon the blazing brands. He had the air of one entirely oblivious of his surroundings, but more than once Yank saw him covertly glance around at the others.

"Ef he hain't plottin' somep'in' crooked, I'm er derned ole fool!" thought the round-shouldered veteran. "He's got er mon'strous bad eye, an' I make it out thet he's er sneak all through. Jest ther same, ef he gits erhead o' ther ole man, he'll hev ter rise up 'arly. Yuma Yank hes seen sech critters as him afore, b'gash!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD MINER IS WIDE AWAKE.

AFTER a while Gila Jack arose and, muttering something about looking after the horses, moved away into the darkness toward the point where the animals could be heard cropping the rich grass.

"Yank." It was Loyal who spoke, in a guarded tone.

"Waal, lad?"

"You are not mad?"

"Yes, I be, so derned mad thet— But, never mind; w'at wuz ye goin' ter say?"

Yank promptly rolled nearer the young man and prepared to listen.

"I was going to speak of this cowboy."

The veteran nodded.

"I wuz jest thinkin' o' him myself."

"I do not like his looks."

"Ner do I, lad."

"He has an evil eye in his head."

"Right ye are."

Loyal glanced into the darkness toward the spot where the person under discussion had disappeared, but there was no sign of Jack's returning figure. Silver-edged Seth was gazing moodily into the fire, utterly regardless of everything around him, his thoughts being of other times and other scenes—the long, long ago.

"I do not believe Gila Jack is to be trusted," asserted Loyal, guardedly, his words uttered for Yank's ears alone.

The old miner nodded so sharply that his black pipe flew from his mouth and fell on the grass. As he picked it up and made sure it was uninjured, he retorted:

"Not er derned bit more do I, pard! Ef thet critter ain't p'ison, then I don't know er blamed thing more nor a natteral-born fool."

"We must look out for him."

"Right erg'in, boy! I'll risk you; you're sharp enough ter look out fer yerself."

"Is it safe to trust him among the horses—alone?"

"Waal, it might not be ef he had his saddle; but, I don't reckon he'll slide an' leave thet ahind," nodding toward the handsome silver-mounted article in question, which lay a short distance away within the circle of firelight.

"But what has he gone out there among the horses for?"

"Ter make sure o' ther position o' ev'ry one an' see thet he kin yank ther picket-pins at ther fu'st hop."

"Then you believe—"

"I believe ther critter means ter try ter guv us ther slip this blessed night."

"And take the horses?"

"Yep."

"He will not be able to do so if we watch him."

"No; an' ef he fin's we're watchin' he'll never

guv us ther chance ter tell whuther ur no he meant ter do ther leetle trick. He'll jest lay off."

"What is to be done?"

"Leave thet ter me, lad. Ef I hain't mistooken, he'll want ter stan' watch ther fu'st part o' the night. Ef he duz, he must bev ther chance. Then I want you ter lay down an' go plumb ter sleep—no shammin', but ther ginowine artikil. Jest you leave ev'rythin' ter yer Uncle Yank."

"And you?"

"Waal, I'll try ter fool ther varmint, but ther ole man 'll be mighty wide awake, bet yer socks on thet! W'en he tries ter git in his fine jiggerin' I'll be thar! Ef he don't heur somep'n' drap, then it'll be sing'ler."

"You will shoot?"

"Mebbe so; mebbe not. I can't jest tell w'at I'll do tell ther time comes. But Jacky boy won't git off with ther hosses, you needn't think he will. Ther ole man 'll step on his coat-tail, an' keeper hoof thar."

At this moment the veteran miner detected the figure of the cowboy returning.

"Member!" he warned cautiously—"member, boy! Let ther critter hev all ther rope he wants! He'll hang him own self. Jest you trust ther ole man."

Then, as Gila came up, he said aloud:

"Yep, they do say it is er howlin' fac' thet ther critter duz r'ally exist—er reg'ler ole devil, hide, hoofs an' horns. But, ef w'at ye say is true, pard, it'll take more'n a Demon Don ter turn me back."

The cowboy instantly became interested.

"Is it Devil Don ye are speakin' of?" he asked.

"Thet same critter; ye've hit it plumb center, fu'st clatter, pard," nodded Yank. "Ther boy hyer thinks thar hain't no sech varmint, but I 'low thar am."

"An' you're right," asserted Gila Jack, taking a seat on the grass and gnawing off a fresh chew of tobacco. "Thar is jest sech er critter, an' I know it!"

"How do you know it, sir?" asked Loyal, appearing deeply interested.

Jack rolled his beady little eyes toward the young man, but instantly rolled them away when he saw Loyal was looking straight at him.

"How do I know it, young teller? Wal, I've seen ther critter. Thet ought ter be er purty good reply."

"It is, for seeing is believing. As I have never seen him, you must pardon my skepticism. Where did you see him, if I may ask?"

"Over by them thar mountains you folks are goin' ter. Mean' R'iley Brad wuz 'tendin' cattle over thar an' stoppin' in er leetle hut. One night ther critter 'leared at our door. Thar wuz er turrible thunder-storm goin' on at ther time, an' jest as thar kem an awful crash an' er flash thet wuz blindin', ther door o' ther hut wuz ripped open by er critter thet uttered sech er laugh as I never 'spects ter hear ag'in—leastwise, I don't want ter, you bet!"

"W'at did he look like?" asked Yank.

"Waal, he looked like ther devil!" was the expressive reply. "He wuz all dressed in blood-red, one eye wuz gone, t'other blazed like er glowin' coal, his mouth wuz full of snags thet stuck out over his lips, an'—wal, he was ther devil!"

"I sh'd say so! W'at'd he do?"

"Nuthin' but guv thet laugh, then ther lightnin' died out. W'en ther next flash kem, he wuz gone. You bet we hustled out of thet ther next day, an' I hain't never bin nigh ther ole hut sence—ther boss can't git me thar!"

For a while they continued to talk, then it was decided to obtain their rest. As expected, Gila Jack offered to stand guard. Yank objected, but gave in when the cowboy insisted. Silver-edged Seth seemed quite unlike the sport that appeared in the Full Hand Saloon the previous evening. He had scarcely a word to say about anything.

As Yank rolled himself in his blanket, he found a chance to whisper in Loyal's ear:

"Go ter sleep—trust me!"

But the young man did not find it an easy thing to follow this advice. For a long time he lay awake, listening to the mournful hooting of an owl and ruminating on the events of the past thirty-six hours. But at last he fell asleep and dreamed of the beautiful girl he first saw in the Full Hand Saloon.

Yank Rollins seemed to be sleeping soundly, but, in truth, he was never more wide awake. He had taken care to lie in such a position that he could watch the valuable saddle of the cowboy through his slightly parted eyelids.

"He won't go off an' leave thet," thought the veteran.

And Yank chuckled with satisfaction as he saw the cowboy carefully regard the recumbent figures, cough slightly as if to make sure all were really asleep, then move cautiously toward the silver-mounted saddle.

CHAPTER XII.

NIGHT WANDERERS.

YUMA YANK longed to break into a chuckle of satisfaction, and it was with difficulty he restrained the impulse to laugh aloud.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" he thought. "I

kin ginerally size sech critters up, an' I didn't make no mistake w'en I spotted that thar one fer crooked. He's goin' ter git ther saddle, then sneak fer ther hosses. Most prob'ly he's got all ther critters so he kin stampede 'em, an' he means ter go yellin' off through ther night like he wuz er derved o'nery 'Pache! Waal, he's apt ter git awfully s'prised. He, he, he!"

Yank literally hugged himself, but never in all his life did he appear more sound asleep. As Jack stood over the saddle, he paused to glance searchingly at the sleepers once more, and just then Yank came nearer snoring than was his usual wont, for he was naturally a light sleeper.

Loyal was sleeping soundly, but, at that moment, Silver-edged Seth began to mutter brokenly. The cowboy started back, as if fearing the giant was about to awake, standing in a crouching attitude just within the dim circle of light made by the embers of the dying fire.

"Hang it!" thought Yank. "Pard Silver-edge hes skeered ther critter out o' it fer jest now. Hear Ole Bigness go it!" as Seth continued to mutter.

But, finally the murmurings of the sleeper ceased, and all was quiet again, save for the hoot of a distant owl or an occasional stamp from the horses. Yank could faintly see the outlines of the animals, though the camp was within the dense shadow of a cluster of small hills, or mountains, and the moon was riding low behind their crests. Out on the plain the moonlight was of a dim and misty sort rarely seen in Arizona, the land of burning days of sunshine and brilliant moonlight nights.

A step carried Gila to the saddle, and he bent as if to lift it cautiously, but paused in a crouching attitude, apparently listening.

"Now w'at!" thought Yank, in disgust. "He acts like he heerd somep'n, but w'at is—"

Then Yank heard "somep'n," and he listened closely.

"Critters comin' this yar way!" flashed through the veteran's mind. "One, two, three—three, at least, an' they're on hosses!"

Suddenly the cowboy knelt and pressed an ear to the ground, remaining several seconds in that attitude, listening to the sound of the advancing horsemen. Yank was puzzled to know what he would do. The question was soon answered.

Leaping to his feet, Jack sprung toward the embers of the fire, and, with a single kick, he sent them flying in a dozen different directions.

In a moment Yank was up, revolver in hand, the drop covering the suspected cowboy's head.

"W'at in blazes hes struck ye?" demanded the miner.

"W'at you up ter, anyhow, critter?" "Sh!" came warningly from Jack's lips, as he lifted a warning hand. "Some galoots ur ruther is comin' this yar way! I kicked out ther fire. They may be critters as hev follered us."

"Oh, is that you, pard?" and Yank lowered the revolver in apparent disgust. "I wuz dreamin' we hed bin jumped by er whole pot an' b'ilin' o' Paches, an' w'en I routed, I reckoned you wuz one o' ther imps."

"They w'u'dn't hev time ter ketch ye very foul of you allus sleeps that way an' wakes ez quick," came grimly from Jack's lips. "I don't 'low it's 'Paches as are comin', but it's two-legged critters on four, an' we don't know who ur w'at they be."

"What is the trouble?" demanded the voice of Silver-edged Seth, the Sport having started up at the alarm.

"Critters comin'," explained the cowboy.

"How many?"

"Not more'n three."

"Then we are enough for them."

Loyal was also awake, and the four men looked to their arms. Yank saw that Jack had forsaken his scheme of deserting them, or put it off for a time, at least.

"But he'll bear watchin'," was the thought which passed through the old fellow's head.

As Loyal and Yank moved toward the horses, the former found a chance to ask:

"How is it, old man—did he play square?"

"He was all ready ter try ther crooked game w'en he heard these critters out yon. That seemed ter kind o' bu'st him up fer ther present. He may hev ernother whirl."

When they had made sure the horses were all right, they were joined by the Giant Sport and the cowboy. Then Yank knelt down and pressed his ear to the ground. At first he could hear nothing.

"They've spotted us," he whispered, "fer they've halted sence ther fire was kicked ter flinders."

Once or twice those who were standing fancied they detected a faint murmur of voices, but they were not sure. At length, Yank lifted one hand, warningly.

"They're comin', pards!" came in a whisper, from his lips—"comin' straight this yar way!"

He arose to his feet and carefully examined the fine Winchester rifle which he had purchased in Kicker's Bar. In the deep shadows his fingers told him as much as his eyes, but, how that the last remnant of the fire had been extinguished, they could all see much better when looking at a little distance.

The hooting of the owl had ceased, and a deep

silence seemed to have settled over everything; but the silence was soon broken by the distant murmur of voices. As the sound did not appear to be approaching, the veteran knelt once more and listened with his ear close to the ground.

"They've halted erg'in," he softly declared. "Holdin' sort o' er pow-wow, I reckon."

However, it was not long before the unknown parties again approached, and by straining their eyes, the four watchers were enabled to perceive the moving figures.

"Peggin' straight this yar way, dad-dern 'em!" muttered the old miner, in disgust. "Look out fer ther critters! Some o' 'em'll whicker an' guv us ther sell-out. Reckon we're in fer diskivery anyhow."

It was not long before the words of the advancing party could be distinguished.

"By the holy grail!" cried a familiar voice. "But thou art a poltroon, me Spanish friend! If thy blood of water hast turned, thou canst go back; but, as for us, we go forward. What fear we for the base minions which may beset us! Our hearts are bold and our purpose strong! We are men! But listen, knave! If now thou desertest us, the worst will it be for thee! Dost hear? dost understand?"

"Si, senor; but you do not understand into what danger you may run. The light is gone, and—"

"I'll swear by me faith I saw it through the darkness glimmer! Dost think these eyes of mine have played me false? Nay, nay! Old age has not set its dimming seal upon them! They are still true."

"There is no doubt but the light was there, senor; but it has vanished. If it was the light of a camp-fire, then the ones who built it have detected our approach and are lying in wait for us. They may be robbers."

"Robbers! Ha! ha! ha! Who steals me purse steals trash! If robbers lay in wait for a wandering actor and unfortunate poet, they will waste their time, eh, Friend Scraggs?"

"The truth you speak, my cultured friend, They'll rue the time that thus they'll spend; For when the solemn truth is spoke, It is a fact that we are broke."

"They may be Indians, senors."

"Ha! ha!"

"You fan our curiosity to a fiercer blaze."

"Long have I desired to beard the native red-man in the heart of his own jungle! Long have I wished to see him in his own true state of savagery! If savages are there, lead us to them! They will not dare harm us!"

"If they do, I will repeat some of my poetry to them. That will soothe them."

"And I will give them a selection from 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.'"

Yuma Yank gave a snort of disgust.

"It's them derved crack-brained critters!" he whispered. "The'd paralyze er common 'Pache with ther poetry an' stuff! Oh, they're safe ter go whar they derved please, fer people will keep as fur from 'em as they kin!"

The three night-wanderers continued to advance toward our friends.

"They are bound to discover us," said Silver-edged Seth. "We shall have an addition to our party, whether we want one or not."

At this moment one of the horses scented those approaching, and a clear, whimpering whinny followed. Instantly Yuma Yank called:

"Halt, thar!"

"The saints preserve us!" gasped the Spaniard who accompanied Shanks and Scraggs.

As for the actor and poet, they nearly fell from the animals they bestrode, so great was their sudden consternation.

"Great Shakespeare!" exclaimed the tragedian.

"Immortal Burns!" muttered the poet.

"I am fain to believe it is robbers, indeed!" moaned Shanks.

"Perchance they may murder us!" faltered Scraggs.

"We should have taken the advice of our guide."

"And now it were well that we should take something else; we should take to flight."

"Alas! I fear it is too late!"

"Then we will stand our ground and perish like warriors."

"I will quote a little poetry."

"And I will repeat a few selections, such as Desdemona's appeal for mercy."

"Which shall speak first?"

"Hold on!" cried Yank. "We can stand 'most anything, but this hain't our night fer swallerin' poetry an' sech stuff. Jest you critters putt on ther brakes."

"That does not sound like the voice of a robber," asserted Scraggs.

"And I do not believe it is an Indian," declared Shanks.

"These may be friends, with whom we can pass the night in safety."

"True, true!"

"Manuel, will you kindly go forward and investigate?"

"Senor, I shall have to beg to be excused."

"What, ho!" cried Shanks. "Then this does indeed brand thee as a coward!"

"Senor should be more choice of his words," was the harsh reply.

"What are we going to do?" asked Loyal.

"We may as well let them come up," said Seth. "They are harmless, and we should not deny them the privilege of camping with us."

A brief consultation followed between the two parties, during which both the actor and the poet assured our friends they possessed nothing of value to tempt the cupidity of robbers, then the three wanderers came forward, and the scattered fire was rekindled beside the stream.

Shanks struck an attitude as the firelight revealed Silver-edged Seth's gigantic figure.

"Behold this noble man!" he cried, gazing admiringly up into the Goliath's face. "This is he who gave us to drink in the saloon at that inferior place called Kicker's Bar. Such kindness I have not forgotten—can never forget! It touched my heart with the finger of gentleness, but little did I dream of meeting you here. Sir, I greet you!"

Seth smiled and accepted the proffered hand.

With a profound bow, the poet removed his tall white hat and ventured upon an impromptu rhyme:

"A man perchance, but like a god
He towers in the air;
Erect and grand he walks the sod,
And I feel small, I swear!"

"Ah-a!" exclaimed Shanks. "Those are the gems which drop unbidden from the lips of me noble associate. It comes as natural to him as it does to breathe."

"Say!" cried Yank. "Putt out ther fire; we won't need any light 'cept w'at'll come from this galoot's red head."

The poet turned and deliberately regarded the old miner, surveying him from head to feet.

"Don't!" laughed the veteran. "You'll jest jazzle my ole eyes an' make me bline!"

But the rhymester promptly retorted:

"What's this I see that talks—a man?
He's bowed as if with pains;
But that's because his head is wood
And lacks a stock of brains."

"Oh, great jizzlin' thutter!" gasped the round-shouldered prospector. "Thet clean knocks me out! I wish I hed kep' still!"

Yank was not offended, for he saw the poet had fairly gotten the better of him at a single shot, and he knew he fired first.

The Spaniard looked after his own horse and the mules ridden by his companions.

Finally, the entire party gathered around the fire, and after a short conversation, decided to seek slumber. Yank volunteered to take the position of guard for a portion of the night, and, to his surprise, Gila Jack did not object.

The old miner had not slept a minute that night, but he stood on duty for three hours before speaking to Loyal. As the young man arose to take the miner's place, the latter whispered:

"Look sharp fer ther derved cowboy, lad! He hain't offered to wiggle, but he may afore mornin'. Ef he duz, don't let him trick ye."

"Trust me, Yank. Get some sleep, and be sure Gila Jack will not trick me."

But Gila Jack seemed to have abandoned all thought of treachery, for the night passed calmly away, and he only arose with the others at the first hint of daybreak.

CHAPTER XIII.

WARNED.

As Major Navrain had said, his ranch had once been a Mexican hacienda. Its walls were of adobe and arranged in the form of a quadrangle, the interior being an open court, or patio. There were some out-buildings near at hand, stables, a corral, and huts which had once sheltered the peon herders.

The ranch seemed almost within the borders of the Mogollon Mountains, but the land for scores of miles around was of the very best nature for grazing to be found in all Arizona. The apparent nearness of the mountains was due to the clear condition of the atmosphere. Although the ranch might be said to stand within the limit of the foot-hills, the sterner peaks which thrust their heads up into the purple haze were forty miles away.

From the azotea, or flat roof of the old hacienda, our friends viewed the mountains upon which the last rays of the setting sun were falling, making them stand out clear and distinct for the time, the gorges and ravines showing like huge black marks.

"And are those the Devil's Mountains there?" asked the Giant Sport, regarding them through a field-glass. "They do not look so very barren and forbidding."

"Thou speakest the truth," agreed J. W. B. Shanks, thrusting a hand into the bosom of his shabby Prince Albert coat and standing with his slender legs bent in opposite directions.

"They really look inviting."

"Thy lips have uttered the word," bowed Scraggs, removing his hat and folding his arms. "They look inviting and—inspiring."

"Oh, noble mounts, so grand so fair!
Ye lift your heads into the air—"

"Your ketching cold in your red hair," put in Yuma Yank.

Scraggs grew suddenly limp, turning a reproachful gaze on the irrelevant old fellow.

"I say, that isn't fair," he declared. "You quite knocked that bit of inspiration out of me."

"Then ther rest o' ther gang owe me a vote o' thanks fer stavin' off ther agony. 'Thet is one o' ther good deeds o' my life."

"I fear there is not the least thing poetic in your hardened nature," sighed Scraggs, replacing his hat on his head and thrusting his hands into his pockets, thus assuming an attitude that made him look like anything but a poet.

Manuel Covote, the Spaniard whom the actor and the poet had in some way induced to guide them to the Devil's Mountains, spoke up!

"From here nothing but the outer border of the Devil's Mountains can be seen, senior," he said.

"Then you mean to give the impression we cannot judge them by what we can see from this point?"

"That is what I mean, senior."

"Have you ever penetrated them?"

"Not far."

"Then you really do not know what their interior is like?"

"I saw quite enough to convince me, senior. It is a barren waste. It appears as if the whole section had been scorched and blackened by a fire or cast out of some underground furnace. The mountains for the most part are bare and timberless. The sun pours down with such a heat as I never experienced anywhere else in Arizona."

"How about the mountains being haunted?"

"They may be, senior; but I saw no spirits. At the same time they overcome one—oppress him. I was nervous all the time I was within their boundaries, and eager to get away. I felt as if some terrible thing might happen to me at any moment."

"Yet you are going back there again?"

"Si, senior."

"You must have a good reason for doing so?"

"I have."

The Spaniard spoke quietly, but he did not allow his eyes to meet those of his questioner. He did not have an unhandsome face, judged by a certain style of good looks, but there was something forbidding about it—something uncertain, unnamable.

The party had reached Major Navrain's ranch, and had consented to pass the night there. Since the meeting of the previous night, Shanks and Scraggs had stuck close by the others, evidently having changed their minds about desiring company on their journey into the mountains.

While the party were viewing the mountains and enjoying the glories of the sunset they were joined by Gila Jack.

"Jest takin' er squint at ther kentry, be ye, pards? Wal, ye'll find it er good kentry ter look at."

It was indeed a beautiful and fertile section that could be seen from the *azotea* of the hacienda. A short distance from the ranch a small river wound ribbon-like through the bottomlands, and everywhere as far as the eye could reach half-wild bronchos and horned cattle were grazing. The ranch was situated that the distant mountains effectually broke the force of the dreaded "northerns."

Gradually the sun, a golden ball of fire, dropped out of sight, and the twilight shadows began to gather even while the distant peaks were tipped with yellow light.

Manuel and Jack finally descended from the roof, and the actor and poet soon followed them, leaving Seth, Loyal and Yank, the last having lighted his pipe and thrown himself down in a recumbent position.

It had grown quite dark when the three were startled by the sudden appearance of another figure on the roof. At first they thought it might be the Spaniard, but a second glance showed it was a female about whose shoulders a *serape* was drawn, thus serving as something of a disguise.

"Hello!" growled Yank. "Who—"

The woman lifted a hand and made a swift gesture of caution.

"Hush, seniors!" she entreated, in a guarded tone. "I have come to warn you."

The shadows concealed her face, but it was plain from her manner of speech she was a Mexican or Spaniard. Glancing at the three, she seemed to select Loyal, and, advancing swiftly to his side, she said:

"You are in danger; all of you."

"Of what are we in danger?"

"Enemies—you have them! They have planned your death, and they only wait the time to strike."

A low whistle came from Yank's lips.

"Waal, thet's intrustin', b'gash!" he muttered. "Looks like we might hev some ginoo-wine ole-fashioned fun afore we are through with this yar' time."

"I hope you will believe, seniors," came earnestly from the woman. "I am taking great risks in warning you, but I do not hate all Gringos."

"Glad ter hear it," nodded the old miner.

"Who are our enemies?" asked Loyal.

"That I cannot tell," was the reply. "Enough I have said already. If you wish to live, keep

away from the Demon Mountains! It means death to go there! You must not tell any one I have warned you, or I will be punished. You will not tell?"

"Of course not."

"Remember—tell no one. You three alone must know it. If I should be detected—*Madre de Dios!*"

She flitted away, quickly disappearing down the stone steps, leaving three astonished men on the *azotea*.

"Waal, I sw'ar!" drawled Yank, after several moments of silence.

"What do you think of it, old man?" asked Loyal.

"Dunno jest w'at ter think. W'at do you think, Pard Silver-edge?"

"I believe the girl was honest."

"I am inclined to think so too," confessed Loyal. "I can see no reason why the girl should come to us with such a warning unless there was something in it."

"Then you think it wuz er gal?"

"Yes; and young, at that, or my ears deceived me. She was not more than eighteen."

"Who kin our enemies be?"

"Who but the ones who most wish to keep us out of the Devil's Mountains?" came soberly from the Giant Sport's lips.

"An' who are them?"

"You say."

"Thet durned cowboy, Gila Jack, fer one!"

"Possibly."

"Well, whoever our foes are," said Loyal, "we will be looking out for them, now that we have been warned."

"Right, lad; an' ef they git erhead o' us three, they'll hev ter rise gol-durned 'arly, ur else stay up all night. Yer Uncle Yank is goin' ter keep his lookers peeled, b'gash!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MIRROR.

THAT night Silver-edged Seth slept alone in a small square room of the hacienda. When he retired to the room he carefully examined the walls to see if he could discover any secret entrance to the apartment, for the warning of the strange girl had strongly impressed him, and he believed there were, indeed, enemies who contemplated injuring himself and his friends, if possible. He had cautioned Yank and Loyal to be on guard, and the old man had declared he would sleep with one eye open.

Seth discovered nothing suspicious, and found the door to the room could be securely bolted from the inner side of the small apartment. A glance from the window showed him the stone-paved *patio* below, with its fountain of water in the center.

"I do not believe I shall be molested here," he muttered, as he glanced at his reflection in a mirror which hung against the wall, a genuine luxury for that part of the country. "I must get some sleep, for I shall need its recuperation after we get into the uncanny mountains. I shall follow Valois Culver into the very heart of that section and wrest little Lois from his grasp. What a contemptible brother for a man to have—what a dastard! I do not think he will harm the girl, so I am not as fierce as I might otherwise be. It is singular he should be so revengeful—it is singular he should not be satisfied with the revenge he has already obtained! I cannot understand the man."

"The one thing I ask is that I may not look on the face of the woman who was once my wife—the woman who is still my wife according to the laws of man, but from whom I am free according to the laws of justice. I do not want to see her, and I fear the result if we should meet face to face. My heart grows hot within me at times, and its mad impulse might outweigh the judgment of my brain and govern the act of my hand. God keep me from such a meeting!"

"I am going to sleep with my hand on a weapon. If any one attempts to enter this room I shall know it."

He removed his boots and coat and lay down upon the bed, his hand really resting on the butt of a revolver as he fell asleep. Once, as slumber was sealing his eyelids, the sudden bark of a dog in the open court aroused him, but he heard the rough voice of a man commanding the animal to be still, and from the readiness with which this order was obeyed it was plain the animal recognized the speaker. Then Seth sunk back and fell asleep again.

He dreamed, and at first it was the old haunting dream of the past. Agnes was there—they were together in a happy home—she smiled on him as of old, and in her hands she held the handsome guitar he bought her when they first became husband and wife—her slim white fingers ran swiftly and lightly over the strings, invoking a soft sweet melody that crept to the tenderest spot of his heart. How real that sweet music sounded! He hung over the ottoman on which she sat, his breath hushed, the beating of his heart stilled. It was sweet—so sweet!

Then she sung—it was the dear song of long ago! How he had loved to hear her sing that song! It seemed as if the very gates of Heaven

opened before his eager eyes! His whole soul was athrob with happiness.

The song ceased, but still those light fingers swept the vibrating strings. Now the music seemed changed. It was still sweet and low, but sad—so sad! It was like the plaintive cry of one broken-hearted—it was like soft rain on the grave of a dead child. The sorrow of that moment laid a cold and callous hand on his heart, which turned to ice at the touch. He shuddered with a great and nameless horror. He tried to ask her to cease playing, but his dry lips made no sound. It was terrible!

At length she looked up at him and smiled, but that smile was so sad that it filled him with despair. Her fingers still touched the strings; the weird melody still ran on, but it was sinking, sinking, sinking, like a pure soul passing from earth. His eyes were fastened on her face, but he saw it fading before him—becoming dimmer, dimmer! He would have stretched out his hands, grasped her, held her, kept her from vanishing, but he was powerless!

And now another horror grew before him. As her sweet face became fainter to his gaze its place was assumed by the outlines of a grinning, ghastly skeleton skull. At first this was very dim and indistinct, but it slowly grew plainer before his fascinated gaze. And still that sobbing music sounded in his ears. He was seized by a fancy that the music was the cause of it all. If she would only stop playing she would still be left to him. With the fury of a madman he tried to shriek aloud, but only faintly he managed to gasp:

"Stop—for God's sake stop!"

He awoke—awoke to find himself sitting straight up on the bed, every limb shaking as if with the ague, every part of his body bathed with clammy perspiration. And as he sat thus, he was staring straight toward the spot where he had observed the mirror against the wall.

But what was this he saw? Was he still dreaming? Was it a hallucination of that most wretched night?

Before him the mirror seemed gone, and in its place there was an opening in the wall! From that opening a gleaming eye looked in upon him—an eye which had no twin in the head in which it was set! Within that opening he saw a hideous face that glowed with a white light—the face of a fiend, distorted and fierce. The lips of the creature could not hide the hideous tusks which protruded from his mouth. It even seemed as if the red, eyeless socket glared upon him!

The man sat staring at this apparition, like one turned to stone. A horrible grin was on the face of the fiendish creature, and the head nodded with devilish delight, causing the crimson peaked cap to wave back and forth like a fiery plume. Then came a hoarse, rasping laugh:

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Great Heavens!" gasped Seth. "It is the Demon of Devil's Mountains!"

Again that horrible laugh sounded through the room.

With a swift movement, the man on the bed lifted the revolver his fingers still clutched, promptly pulling the trigger when it came to a level.

The report of the revolver seemed almost like a clap of thunder in that small room, and the burst of smoke that came from the muzzle kept the man from noting the result of the shot for a time.

He did not wait for the smoke to clear, but, springing from the bed, he struck a match and lighted the little oil lamp with which he had been provided. Then, revolver still in hand, he went forward to note the result of the shot.

In a moment he found himself standing before the mirror, but the glass was forever ruined, his bullet having struck in the very center of it!

"Great Scott!"

Silver-edged Seth could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Am I going mad? I would have sworn the mirror was gone and there was an opening in the wall in its place. What can it mean?"

To his ears came the sound of hurrying footsteps and excited voices, showing his shot had been heard.

"They will be here in a moment and demand an explanation. What shall I tell them?"

There came a rap on his door, and he called:

"Who is there?"

Yuma Yank's voice replied:

"It's us, pard—me an' Loy. W'at's ther matter with ole Hannah?"

"Nothing at all, Yank."

"But, we heard a shot. Didn't you fire?"

"My revolver was discharged by accident as I was handling it."

There was a moment's pause, during which Seth heard the two men exchange a few words, then the old miner called:

"I say, pard, is that straight goods?"

"Certainly."

"Thet settles it, then. We thought likely ye wuz in some kind o' trouble an' might need our help, so we kem on ther clean jump. You've bu'st up our snooze, an' I 'low it seems er durned queer time fer ye ter be cleanin' o' yer guns. Howsumdover, I hain't got ernother durned word ter say. Ef ye let drive erg'in, ye'll find

us both at ther door ter know w'at ther racket is. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Seth listened at the door, and heard the veteran explaining to others that the shot was an accidental discharge of a weapon.

"But you do not believe it yourself, old man," half laughed the Goliath. "I shall have to tell you the truth to-morrow."

Seth listened by the door till the sound of retreating footsteps died out, then he turned back to the shattered mirror.

"Something makes me think Satan himself is abroad to-night," he muttered, holding the light so he could examine the ruined glass. "I declare I do not know what to think about that head I saw—or fancied I saw!"

He set the lamp on a little stone shelf, and then he made a closer examination. The mirror was fastened against the wall, but he found little difficulty in removing it. If he expected to make a discovery by so doing, he was disappointed and his time was wasted, for behind the mirror the wall was solid, showing no crack or fissure that was not well filled with cement. With the blade of his knife he pried into some of the cemented places, but he was unrewarded by a discovery. He thumped lightly on the wall, but the sound told him nothing.

The mystery remained a mystery still.

"Can it be I was deceived by my own imagination?" he asked, aloud. "It almost seems so, yet I know I was wide awake. What went before was a dream, but I was not dreaming when I saw that horrible head. No, no! that was genuine, yet—was it?"

Never in all his life had Seth Culver been more puzzled, and he saw no way of solving the mystery.

"If I had arisen from the bed and approached the mirror, I might have learned the truth. As it is, I am left in the dark."

He replaced the mirror, and then he removed the empty shell from the chamber of his revolver, returning a good cartridge.

"I scarcely fancy I shall sleep any more this night," he muttered. "I would sleep, but I do not care to repeat that dream. The nearer I approach the retreat of the woman who was once my wife, the more I am haunted by dreams of her. They keep me from securing the rest I need. I am not satisfied what I saw to-night was an hallucination, yet it would not be strange if my mind were breaking down sufficiently to be thus deceived by its own wild fancies."

He found the room uncomfortably close, but a breath of cool air came in from the open window. By this he paused a few moments, noting the moon must be well down toward the point of setting.

At length, he flung himself down on the bed once more. He had no thought of sleep, and for more than an hour he lay awake, but finally he gradually sunk into a fitful doze. Once again he dreamed, but the visions were vague and broken. He saw a score of different scenes, all of which flitted dimly before his mental vision. Now and then he murmured, but his words were inarticulate.

Suddenly he was aroused by a great clamor. He started up to hear a babel of sounds coming through the open window—barking of dogs, shouts of men, a rushing roar, then half-a-dozen shots in swift succession!

What did it mean?

CHAPTER XV.

THE NIGHT RAID.

In a moment Silver-edged Seth was on his feet, and it almost seemed as if he sprung into his boots at a single bound. His coat he flung upon his back, then shot back the bolt and tore open the door.

The old hacienda resounded with sounds, amid which were the hoarse shouts of men and the shrill cries of women. Seth saw several rushing figures, and he hastened forward to get outside as soon as possible.

Just when he was joined by Yuma Yank and Loyal Kingdon he did not know, but he suddenly heard the old miner's voice at his side.

"Ther Ole Nick hes bruck loose this time fer sure!" cried Yank. "Thar's hot work afoot, pard!"

"What has happened?" asked Seth.

"Er gang o' hustlers hev bin gittin' in their work. Reckon thar's bin er stampede."

As they hurried out into the patio Gila Jack joined them.

"It's ther derned rustlers!" shouted the cowboy. "They're lightin' out with ther best critters, ther hosses ther ther boss kep' in ther corral nights. Satan singe 'em all!"

This final imprecation was directed toward the cattle-thieves, not the horses.

The big entrance gateway had already been unbarred by the cowboys who had reached it ahead of them, and as they dashed out, they heard the thunder of the stampeded horses, a sound swiftly receding.

"They're bein' belled!" cried the cowboy. "I caught ther soun' when ther rush fu't started. But how ther critters managed ter git in their work ser quick is w'at gits me. Both Stub Short an' Hickory Ben wur thar ter look out fer

things an' guv ther 'larm. Thar's bin crooked work somewhar!"

As they hurried forward they saw a group of figures near the open entrance to the corral, the light of a lantern revealing them. Toward this knot they hurried.

"W'at is it?" demanded Gila Jack. "W'at's ther row hyer?"

"It's Hickory Ben," was the reply of one of the men; "he's socked fer keeps."

Jack pressed his way to the center of the throng, at the same time crying commandingly:

"W'at you critters all wastin' time yere fer? We've got ter foller them p'ison imps of Satan! Thar's hosses in ther stables. Hump yerselves, pards, an' git 'em redde fer er hot chase! Hump, I say, you derned sinners!"

It was plain Jack held a position of some importance, for the greater part of the men instantly sprung to obey. Gila howled after them:

"Saddle up my critter, an' bring hosses fer these other two yere!"

Then he bent over the faintly moaning man upon the ground, whose head was resting in a comrade's lap.

"I say, Pard Ben."

"Waal, Jack?"

"Whar hes it ketched ye?"

"Right here," said the man who held the wounded man's head, and lifting the lantern he showed a mass of cloth thrust into a bleeding wound in the man's breast. "Thet hes stopped ther blood some fer ther present."

Gila Jack examined the wound a bit, but it did not take a very keen perception to tell it was fatal. Hickory Ben's minutes were numbered.

"Curse the p'ison skunk who fired thet shot!" cried Gila Jack. Then he bent eagerly forward to ask: "Who was it, Ben? Who did this dirty piece of work? Where is Stub Short?"

"Gone!" whispered the dying cowboy. "It wuz him!"

Jack started back.

"Him—Stub Short?"

"Yes. He played crooked. He tried ter git me inter ther game, but I wouldn't go."

"W'at game? Talk as lively as ye kin, Ben, fer we must git arter them imps in jest erbout two holy shakes. W'at game wuz it?"

"Stealin' ther hosses in ther corral."

"You don't mean ter say he worked thet erlone?"

"No: thar wuz others. He said they wuz waitin' all ready ter come at ther signal. I thought he wuz jokin' at fu'st, but I foun' he wuzn't."

"Then he shot ye?"

"He tried ter open ther corral fu'st. I pulled er gun an' swore I'd blow him cold ef he did, rustlers ur no rustlers. Then he fooled me by laffin' of it off an' sayin' he wuz only tryin' ter see w'at stuff I wuz made of. W'en he ketched me off guard he let me hev. He didn't no more'n fire afore thar wuz er dozen critters roun', an' ther corral wur ripped open. Then they stampeded ther critters an' Short tolled 'em with er bell. I wuz down, but I done my best ter wipe out ther skunk thet putt me hyer, though my han' shook so I 'low not er derned bullet tetched him."

"But he shell pay dearly fer it, pard!" declared Jack. "We'll run ther critter down an' close out his 'count, curse him! I allus thought thar wuz some'n' crooked 'bout thet imp."

Then he turned to the cowboy who held Hickory Ben's head, saying:

"See ther pore devil's got inter ther ranch an' hev Pepita look arter thet wound. She kin fix it up best of anybody, ef she is er gal."

"Jack."

"Waal, Ben?"

"It's some'n' I wants ter tell ye."

"Go erhead, pard."

"Ye won't think hard of me?"

"Thar's no need ter ax thet. W'at is it, old fellow?"

"I uster think you wuzn't jest w'ite, Jack, but I reckon I made a bad break. You an' I hed trouble oncet w'en—"

"Thar, thar! don't speak of thet ole 'fair now, pard! I've clean fergot it."

"I struck ye."

"An' I swore I'd git squar'. Wal, hain't I squar' now?"

"You don't hole no grudge?"

"Nary bit."

"Will ye shake?"

"Shore I will."

He took the dying cowboy's hand.

"Fer ther last time, Pard Jack. You are goin' arter them critters; w'en ye comes back I'll hev reached ther eend of ther trail. Ben Bandon is goin' ter ther great round-up."

Gila Jack turned his face away.

All this had taken but a short time, and the thundering hoofs of the stampeded horses could be still heard when the cowboys came pouring out of the stables with their saddled horses, among which three were prepared for Yank, Loyal and Silver-edged Seth.

"Is ev'ry man armed?" asked Gila Jack, as he joined the others. "Thar may be hot work afore we git back, fer we are goin' fer vengeance as well as ther stolen critters. Ef ther major war only hyer now!"

The men were all armed after the usual cowboy fashion.

"No good fer long range," muttered Jack, loud enough to be heard; "but thar may be some short-range fightin'."

Yank thought of his Winchester, but there was no time to get it then, for the order was given to mount, and the party swung into the saddle. In another moment they were off in pursuit of the rustlers.

"I 'lows this yar's some'n' we didn't figger on, eh, pards?" observed Yank to Seth and Loyal. "This is er leetle bit of night work thet we hedn't laid out on ther programmer."

"No; we hardly expected this," said Seth. "It is too bad Major Navrain was not at home."

"Thet's so; but ther critters knowed how ter pick ther time ter git in their work. Thet thar whelp as shot t'other un wuz er spy."

"And a dastardly traitor!" exclaimed Loyal. "I hope we shall overtake them and get our hands on him."

"Ther boys 'll make short work o' him ef they do, now you jest bet yer sweet life on thet!"

"Lynching is what he deserves."

"An' w'at he'll git ef taken. But, I say, Pard Seth, w'at wuz ther real meanin' o' thet shot you fired in ther room ter-night? 'Course I know you hain't ther kine ter be pullin' off a gun w'en ye wuz cleanin' it."

Seth drew rein a bit, making a motion that was only observed by Yank and Loyal. They instantly fell back with him, and then he told them what he saw, or fancied he saw, in the mirror of the room where he had passed a portion of the night. Both the young man and the old miner listened with unaffected interest.

"Derned ef I don't believe you saw ther ginoowine ole Demon o' ther Devil's Mountains!" cried Yank.

"But you know I do not believe in this Demon," protested the Giant Sport.

"Then w'at in blazes do you think ye saw?"

"I have about arrived at the belief that it was all fancy—I saw nothing."

But Yank was not ready to accept such an explanation.

"You don't drink, boss, an' thar hain't no reason why you sh'ud 'magine sech er thing. It's derned sart'in ther imp o' sin wuz in these parts ter-night, an' I 'low his crew made ther raid on ther corral."

"But you do not still think this Demon anything supernatural, do you?"

"I dunno jest w'at ter think, b'gash!"

"If he was anything of that sort, he would hardly stoop to the business of stealing cattle, for he would have no use for them."

"I hain't jest got ther figgerin' through my ole head yit, fer thar's some'n' derned singler 'bout it. Ef we keeps on inter them mountains, we'll settle it ur leave our bones abind."

The moon had long before dropped below the horizon line, and darkness shrouded the plain. But the sound of the stampede guided the cowboys in their pursuit, and they urged their horses with word and spur.

Suddenly the outlines of mounted men were seen away to the right, and a yell of defiance was wafted through the night by the breeze. The cowboys promptly echoed the cry, and many of them would have turned in pursuit of the figures had not Gila Jack shouted:

"Stiddy, lads, stiddy! Thet's er trick ter pull us off arter them w'ile they git erway with ther critters! Hole yer level, pards!"

As so the pursuit of the stampeded horses still continued, although the yelling rustlers fired several ineffectual shots at the cowboys and seemed trying to draw them aside in various other ways. Some of the shots the cattlemen returned, but this was abandoned when it was seen how useless it was at that distance.

But, gradually, Yank, Loyal and Seth swerved to the left, still keeping abreast the cowboys, but getting nearer the defiant rustlers.

"Ef we kin git one ur two pops at ther imps, it'll be some fun," nodded the old miner. "Any derned thing fer excitement, so sez I!"

But the wily cattle-thieves drew off as they approached, plainly hoping to lure the three from the rest of the party. However our friends were wise enough to keep within sight of the cowboys.

Suddenly the pursuers checked their speed, and their cries of surprise were plainly heard by the trio.

"What is the meaning of that?" exclaimed Loyal, in amazement.

"Listen!" cried Yank. "Can't ye hear it, pards? Ther stampede hes turned, and ther hull mess o' critters are comin' back this yar way hull-a-whoopin'!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TREACHERY TRIUMPHANT.

It was true. The sullen thunder of many hoofs became louder with each passing second. The stampeded horses had been turned in some unexplainable manner, and they were sweeping back over the rolling plain, following the course between two hill-like swells. How this sudden change had come about neither the cowboys nor our trio of friends seemed to understand just then.

The stampeded herd was nearer than any one of the party thought possible, for in a few moments the dark, on-rushing mass was plainly discernible.

A yell of satisfaction came from the cowboys. "Guv ther critters er clear road!" shouted Gila Jack, as he set the example by spurring toward the crest of the swell to the right.

His comrades followed him closely. "We've got ter git out o' ther track, pard!" declared Yuma Yank. "It's turn ter ther left, ur else git run under. Ther hain't no time ter join ther rest o' ther gang."

A glance to the left failed to discover the dark figures of the rustlers who had been faintly visible a short time before. They had vanished into the darkness of the night.

The old miner led the way, Seth and Loyal keeping close to his horse's flanks.

"Plenty o' time, pard!" laughed the veteran. "An' thar hain't much o' any danger, anyway, 'less a feller's horse sh'd go down afore them. All ther same I hain't sayin' I hedn't rayther be behind then in front, fer ther critters are jest stun-blind w'en they gits started. Ther cowpunchers 'll hev ter work 'em down an' git 'em under check, else some o' ther best in ther lot 'll be sp'iled."

He was obliged to shout the final words, for the roar of the on-coming animals had become terrific. Loyal cast an anxious glance toward the mass, feeling far from easy, though he discovered they were almost, if not quite, out of the track of that mad route.

"Reckon Major Navrain must go in fer hoss-raisin'," shouted Yank, as he looked back. "Thar's er mess o' 'em."

Suddenly and most unexpectedly the course of the stampeded animals swerved toward our friends. The cause of the unlooked-for change was the sudden charge of the cowboys, who turned their attention to gaining control of the frightened horses.

"Red spurs, pard!" yelled Old Yank, driving the rowels deep into the sides of his horse. "Git ter movin' ef ye don't want ter beswept erlong on ther front o' that cyclone! They'll make jilly o' ve ef yer critter goes down! Look out fer—Great God!"

Loyal Kingdon's horse suddenly slumped and fell headlong, having thrust its leg into the hole of some burrowing animal. The young Denverite was hurled headlong to the ground, his feet flying clear of the stirrups. But for that fortunate clearance he would have been doomed.

Even as the horse fell, Loyal realized his peril, and through his head flashed the thought that it meant death if he was stunned—perhaps it meant death, anyway! As he felt himself hurled forward, he made a resolution to spring up the instant he touched the ground. His extended hands did not keep him from plunging forward on his face as he struck, and he was badly shaken up and dazed; still he had presence of mind enough to leap upon his feet, but right there his judgment was at fault.

Loyal knew he must flee, but the shock had blinded and confused him. Still he did not hesitate, well knowing hesitation meant death, if he were to depend on himself for escape. In some way he became turned about, and in a moment he started to run directly toward the on-coming herd—straight into the teeth of certain death!

Silver-edged Seth had witnessed Kingdon's misfortune, and, even as the young man's horse went down to rise no more, that of the Sport Goliath wheeled as if on a pivot, reined by the strong hand of its master.

Like a thunderbolt the noble animal swept back toward the rushing mass—back into the teeth of a terrible danger—back to save a human life!

Scarcely two steps did Loyal Kingdon take when an iron band grasped his belt, and he was lifted off his feet, to be flung across a horse's withers, and held there by that saving grip. Then Silver-edged Seth's horse wheeled toward a point of safety once more, and the Giant Sport found Yuma Yank at his side.

Not a word passed between them then, for they were still in danger, and the thunder of many hoofs prevented conversation. Strongly they reined to the right, being scarcely three rods in advance of the maddened horses. When they swept out beyond the course of the stampede, the gap had narrowed down to a few feet, but they passed safely out of the danger, though nearly smothered by the dust-cloud arising from the beating hoofs.

In a surging mass the wild horses swept by, the cowboys spreading behind, and on either side, to direct their course.

Yuma Yank drew a long breath, coughed a little, then calmly observed:

"Them critters kick up er 'tarnal dust."

Still somewhat dazed, but realizing he was safe, preserved by a friendly hand, Loyal Kingdon found himself on his feet. He felt he had passed the closest call of his life, and he knew how utterly incapable words were of expressing his feelings. So he did not speak, but mutely held out his hand to his savior.

In the same manner, Silver-edged Seth accepted the silent token of thanks, his own broad hand grasping that of the grateful young man.

Yuma Yank broke the silence with another cough, observing:

"I don't reckon it's wu'th while ter go back ter look fer ther saddle, fer thar hain't much left o' saddle ur boss."

This they knew was true.

Yank and Seth held a brief discussion, in which, however, Loyal did not join. They decided to follow the cowboys, who seemed to be heading the herd toward the ranch. Loyal swung up behind Yank, and the start was made.

They had not ridden far when they were met by three cowboys, of whom Gila Jack was one.

"Hello!" exclaimed Jack. "We wuz lookin' fer you. But whar's t'other boss?"

Explanations followed, and Loyal was congratulated on his lucky escape. With a few words he made them understand how much he owed to the noble giant.

"It's too bad," asserted the cowboy, "fer we wanted you three ter join er gang as is goin' ter look arter these yar rustlers. We hev swore ter hev vengeance fer Hickory Ben. But, I'll tell ye w'at ye kin do," as if with a sudden thought. "You two on one hoss kin go ter ther ranch an' come with t'others, fer thar are more o' ther boys comin' arter ther critters are settled. Pard Silver-edge kin go with us three ter join six o' ther boys away yen. That'll make ten o' us. Want ter come, pard?"

"If there is any more excitement on the programme, I want a hand in it," was the prompt declaration.

"Good enough! I'll 'low you're ez good ez three ur four common men, so we'll make er strong team."

A few more words passed, then Seth accompanied Jack and his comrades, while Loyal and Yank continued toward the hacienda.

Just then the giant had no thought of treachery, and he little dreamed how easily he had been lured into a trap!

As they rode along, one of the cowboys fell behind, while Gila Jack engaged the Sport Goliath in conversation. Suddenly a rawhide noose fell over Seth's head, closing around his arms and pinning those members to his sides. Then he was jerked backward from his horse to fall with stunning force on the hard ground!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GOLIATH CAPTIVE.

SILVER-EDGED SETH heard that whistling noose before he saw or felt it, and he made a vain effort to dodge the coil, his hands instinctively falling on the butts of his waiting weapons. When the *riata* closed around his arms the revolvers had left their holsters for places in his hands, and as he was jerked backward, one of the self-acting fire-arms was discharged by the unintended pressure of a finger on the trigger.

A snarl of rage and dismay came from Gila Jack's lips.

"Drag him, Gilson!" cried the treacherous cowboy to the one who had thrown the lasso. "He has his guns out and ready! Thet shot's apt ter rout up ther others an' make 'em think somep'n's wrong! Don't let ther critter do it some more!"

Obedient to the command, the lassoer wheeled his horse and started away, a living human drag fast at the end of his rope.

Silver-edged Seth struck the hard ground with terrific force, but even such a jarring concussion was not sufficient to deprive the giant of his senses. Had not the lassoer started to drag him, he might have found opportunity to use the revolvers to which he still clung with a grip of iron. A turn of the wrist below the cutting noose would have brought them to line, a pressure of the finger would have sent the lead speeding on its mission of destruction. Either the cowboys would have been forced to shoot the entrapped Goliath or he would have closed the career of the treacherous trio.

Gila Jack, as quick-witted as he was dastardly, had reasoned this out in the twinkling of an eye after the unexpected discharge of Seth's weapon, therefore his order. No sooner was the command given than Jack reined his horse sharply about to keep his comrade company.

In that manner the Giant Sport was dragged for several rods, the lassoer ahead and the other cowboys each side of that bounding, helpless human figure.

Suddenly Jack gave a sharp whistle, and the lariat-thrower reined in his horse so sharply that the creature was thrown back on its haunches, its forward feet striking at empty air.

"At him, Mint!" hissed the chief rascal, setting the example himself by leaping from the saddle and flinging himself upon the prostrate figure.

Remarkable as it may seem, Silver-edged Seth had held fast to his weapons through all that occurred; but he was too shaken and battered to attempt to use them or offer resistance when the two men sprung upon him, so the revolvers were quickly wrested from his fingers.

"Ha! ha!" rung out the evil, triumphant laugh of Gila Jack. "We hev roped our Maver-

ick in great shape, an' thet's er fac'. But, be lively 'bout holpin' me wind him up, Mint. Ef ther critter gits ter kickin' afore we hev him fast, ther Ole Boy'll be ter pay an' no pitch hot! Work spy, Clumsy Fingers!"

And work spy they did, but for all of that they had none too much time, as Seth offered a desperate resistance before they had him entirely secure. Had his arms been free, he would have proved more than a match for them, stunned and battered though he was.

"H-hain't—he—ther—very ole—sarnip!" panted the cowboy called Mint. "He's ther toughest—cuss I ever—saw!"

"Wal, now you've struck it, pard!" nodded Gila Jack. "He's derved nigh er second ole Samson, an' thet's er blessed fac', by Moses!"

"Most any other galoot'd bin all tored out—w'dn't hed enough wind left ter wiggled his leetle finger."

"This critter hain't built thet way. I knew w'at he wuz, thet's why I hed Gil guv him ther drag. Hev ye made yer knot tight?"

"Tight an' strong, pard."

"Good! I reckon he's whar thar hain't much danger of his doin' harm ter us."

"Do not be too sure of that, you devils!" grated the giant. "The day will come when I will call you to an account for this bit of work!"

Gila Jack laughed, but it was plainly forced.

"You crow mighty soon fer er cock as hes hed his comb clipped, don't ye!" sneered the treacherous cowboy. "Your talkin' apperatus seems ter be in good workin' order, fer all of ther 'tarnal shakin' up ye got."

"Derved ef his eyes hain't glowin' like coals!" muttered Mint, drawing back, as if with fear. "I never saw ther like of thet afore 'cept in thet right eye of the boss!"

"You sbet!" commanded Jack harshly. "You talk too much with your mouth, Mint! Jest guv yer tongue er rest an' let me do ther chinnin'."

The one addressed drew still further back, offering no retort, a fact which revealed Jack's power of command.

"Now, you critter," and the chief rascal of the trio turned his eyes on the helpless giant—"now I reckon you kind of understan' thar's sech er thing as takin' an almighty tumble! You wuz swelled bigger'n er toad puffed with wind, an' you needed somep'n' ter take ye down er notch. We wuz jest ther boys ter do it."

"But you are not at the bottom of this dastardly piece of treachery," declared the Goliath.

"Who says I hain't?"

"I say so."

"An' I s'pose you 'low you know? Why sh'dn't I be at ther bottom of it?"

"Why should you?"

"P'raps I am on some kind of a lay—p'raps I am workin' a scheme."

"What scheme that you should do this dirty trick?"

"Oh, thar's plenty of 'em I c'd be at. Mebbe I wants ter go through yer clothes an' rake onder yer boodle."

"I do not doubt your intention of doing that, but you would not have made the venture for a thing that promised no more. You would not have thrust your head into the noose had not there been a master mind to lay the scheme."

The darkness partially concealed the angry scowl that disfigured the cowboy's face—a scowl which showed he did not like the words which came from the lips of his helpless captive.

"P'raps you think I hain't got brains enough ter work sech er game," he growled. "Ef so, you'll hev ter 'low thet I've got enough ter kerry it out putty 'tarnal straight, an' you never smelt er rat tell you wuz clean inter ther snare."

"I will confess I was easily deceived that time, but I had begun to think you might be a white man, though your face denies such a supposition."

Jack uttered another snarl.

"You sing mighty keerless fer er bird thet is cotched in such er way," he gritted. "Best hev er check on yer tongue, ef you don't want it ter lead you inter trouble wuss then ye're in now."

Silver-edged Seth laughed scornfully.

"You have the courage to threaten when you think you are safe," sneeringly. "But that only shows what a genuine coward you are at heart. Wait! There is a time coming when we shall stand face to face, man to man—I hope."

"Wal, I reckon hope is all ther good it will do ye, fer after ther boss gits through with ye, I don't believe you'll be fit fer anything but plantin'."

"Then I was right, I see—there is a chief villain laid behind all this. He is keeping in the background; why don't he come up like the dastardly dog he is? I cannot harm him just now; why doesn't he show himself?"

"Don't you be in sech er 'tarnal rush, fer I reckon you'll see him soon enough, an' ef you don't see er derved sight more'n ye want ter of him, I'm 'wav off my reckonin'. He hain't no chicken, hain't ther boss, an' w'en he gits er dost in fer er man, thet galoot's ball of yarn is ther same as wound up, you bet! I dunno jest w'at it is he lays out erg'in' you, but I do know he seems ter hate ye powerful bad. Ef he hed sech er charge laid up fer me, an' I knew it, I'd putt hafe ther worl' atween us as quick as I c'd."

"This boss of yours must be a fearful creature!" sneeringly.

"He is er holy horror on trucks!"

"You make me eager to see him. When will he appear?"

Jack turned toward the lassoer, saying:

"Go fetch up ther boss, Gil."

The man turned his horse and galloped away into the darkness.

"He won't be long gittin' byer," assured Gila Jack. "He'll come hot foot w'en he hears as how we hev roped ther steer he wants ter see."

"Until then I suppose I will have to endure the company of his two dirty satellites."

Jack chuckled, rubbing his horny hands together till they made a rasping sound.

"Thar jest don't seem ter be no other way fer ye, duz thar, ole man? You'll hev ter be thet perlite, at least. We'll try ter make it as pleasant as we possibly kin fer ye."

"I suppose you will have to examine my valuables? If so, go ahead and get the job over as soon as possible."

"Thet's whar you make er mistake, Pard Bigness. Ther boss is kind of odd 'bout some things, an' he says fer us not ter tetch yer wallybles an' he'll make it right. He allus keeps his word, so we hain't goin' ter clean ye out."

"I see the lay of the land," quietly declared Seth. "He is the one who proposes to go through my wardrobe. Well, that lowers your boss in my estimation to a great depth, for I did think he might be some kind of a decent rascal, even though he did employ such miserable tools to do his dirty work."

Once again a growl came from the lips of the little cowboy, and his beady eyes fairly snapped.

"Ef I hedn't gi'n my word not ter harm ye more'n I hed ter—Derned ef I hain't good mind ter, anyhow!" and he lifted a clinched fist above the helpless giant's face.

Silver-edged Seth did not quail; his eyes met the unsteady orbs of the treacherous cowboy squarely.

"It would be like such a dastardly dog," he deliberately said. "But I have a good memory."

"I don't reckon it'll do ye much good arter ter-night. Ef I hain't mistooken, ther boss will polish ye off in great shape. You needn't think you are goin' back ter ther ranch ter guv me er way ter ther major, fer yer hain't—leastwise, I don't 'low you are."

He lowered his hand, thrust it into his pocket and produced a huge plug of tobacco, from which he gnawed off a huge quid.

"Hev some, pard?" and he held the tobacco out to Seth's lips. "You may as well chaw an' take life easy w'ile ye hev er chance."

"Many thanks for your kindness, but I do not indulge in that manner. However, if you will feel in the upper left-side pocket of my coat, you will find a case of cigars. I really would not mind smoking to pass the time away."

With a coarse chuckle, the cowboy felt for the case and found it. He extracted one of the cigars, clipped the end with his knife, then thrust the weed into the cool giant's mouth. Striking a match, he held it to the end of the cigar, three or four pulls from the helpless man giving the required fire.

"Thanks again," said the sport. "For this, you and your comrade are at liberty to select from the case."

Jack drew out two more cigars, retaining one himself and passing the other to Mint, who was calmly crouching near at hand. Neither of the cowboys lighted their weeds.

"We don't keer too much 'bout slingin' on style w'en ther boss is comin'," explained Jack. "He might not like it, an' we hain't ther boys ter want ter hev his dislike, eh, Mint?"

"Nary time," agreed the other.

"Hark!"

Gila Jack held up his hand, and the three listened. The beating hoofs of approaching horses could be plainly heard.

"Ther boss is comin'!" exclaimed Jack.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HATRED OF A BITTER FOE.

THE sounds swiftly drew nearer, and finally two horsemen were seen through the gloom. Jack arose to his feet and gave a peculiar whistle, which was answered in a similar manner from those advancing. A moment later the horses were reined in close at hand, and one of the riders promptly swung out of the saddle, dropping lightly to the ground.

"You have done good work, Jack," said this person. "You shall be properly rewarded. Now, you may retire while I speak with this gentleman, but keep within hailing distance."

This final command was promptly obeyed by the three satellites of the chief rascal; then the man came forward and stood above the helpless Goliath, his arms folded over his breast.

Silver-edged Seth saw the man before him was not an infant in size, being much larger than ordinary men. His face was concealed by a black mask.

Deliberately the Giant Sport blew out a wreath of smoke, then he said:

"Good-evening! I don't know as it is my place to speak first, but I will under the cir-

cumstances. This is a large night for rat-catching."

Still the other uttered no sound; still he stood with folded arms, gazing down at the helpless victim of his plot.

After waiting a few seconds, Seth muttered: "It's funny Jack didn't speak of that, but I begin to believe this fellow is deaf and dumb. Wonder how I shall talk with him! I do not imagine he will release my hands to give me a chance."

Still he continued calmly pulling at the cigar. Suddenly the masked man crouched by the side of his captive. With a grating exclamation, he snatched the cigar from Seth's mouth and flung it away.

"Now see here!" protested the giant. "I don't like that! It is what I call real rude."

"You are altogether too cool, Seth Culver!" came from the lips concealed by the sable mask.

"Ah! so you know my name! Well, you may think I am cool, but I do not feel that way. Instead, I feel hot—decidedly hot! You would be apt to feel so, my dear sir, if you had taken a ride across the plain hitched at the end of a lasso. It is a wonder I am not all broken up, and I will allow I shall be sore in various spots to-morrow."

"If you live to see to-morrow's sun rise!"

"I forgot to add that. You have my thanks for tacking it on."

"You play your part well, Seth Culver," came from the crouching man. "But I know enough of you to understand how much it costs you to keep your hot passion in check. If your hands were free, you would fly like a mad-dog at my throat."

"My dear sir, I am not denying I would like the pleasure of shutting off your wind. It would give me great satisfaction. But, under the existing state of things, I know that is impossible, so I keep calm. My time will come."

"Never! It is useless for you to entertain such a hope. I am beyond your clutch, and if you live to see another day and stand a free man, I will still be beyond your grasp."

"The best of us are sometimes deceived."

"You never spoke truer words, Seth Culver."

"Who are you that calls me by my name?"

"Ha! ha! You have not guessed? I thought you would not, for I am one you have not seen for years. I am your bitterest foe, and I hate you with an undying hatred!"

"That ought to make me feel easy!"

"Still you do not know me. I scarcely wonder, for you hardly knew me as a foe in the past. Still, if you racked your memory, it is possible you might recall me."

But Seth replied: "I cannot, though I will confess there seems something familiar about you. You knew me—just when?"

"Years and years ago."

"That is not definite."

A sneering laugh came from the mask.

"If you recall the happiest and most miserable periods of your life, it was then you knew me. It was then you little dreamed how remorseless an enemy you had unconsciously made of me. In those old days I loved the same woman you loved."

"What—not Agnes?"

Once more the masked man laughed. "You have guessed it at last—it was Agnes! You know how you loved the girl yourself—you know how she seemed all the world to you! You thought life would not be worth living without her; you thought all an enraptured lover could think. Those same thoughts and emotions filled my heart. I loved the beautiful creature more than I loved my own life, but I loved her in secret, for a felt there was little chance for me to win her. I had two rivals, yourself and your brother Valois. I saw she cared for one of you, but for a time I was at a loss to tell which was preferred. Now can you guess who I am?"

But, Silver-edged Seth was still at a loss to speak the man's name.

"It is strange you should be so dull; you were not in the past," sneered the masked villain. "You should readily recall me now. You must remember no one knew of my love for Agnes Norwood; she scarcely dreamed of it herself, though she must have seen it in my eyes. I worshiped the very ground she walked upon; any time I would have been willing—nay glad! to have lain down that my body could have kept her feet from touching the common earth. I felt she was little short of an angel. Was I mad? Yes, yes! mad with love of her!"

Mad! The man seemed more like a madman at that moment than aught else! Through one of the eye-holes in the black mask the helpless captive saw an eye that fairly gleamed as if a little furnace burned deep in its innermost recess. There was something about that glittering orb that made the giant shiver, brave man though he was.

Suddenly the masked unknown flung out his clinched hands, a savage exclamation breaking from his lips.

"I am a fool to think of these things!" he cried. "Yet they must be thought of, else how can I tell you of my sweet revenge? You little dreamed how near you walked to death at least

a score of times after I saw you were the favored suitor for Agnes Norwood's hand. You little dreamed how many nights I watched your retreating form, a glittering knife in my hand, black murder in my heart. Why I did not strike you down is more than I can tell. Something held me back. I put it off till after she became yours; then I aimed a more terrible blow at your heart!"

"You were married; you had secured the prize I coveted, and I was alone with my rage and fury. How I hated you! Yet I met you day after day with a smile on my face, and you never dreamed of the furnace in my heart. All that time I was waiting, waiting, waiting! I scarcely knew what I was waiting for myself, but I felt the time would come when I could cause you as much misery as you caused me. It came!"

Silver-edged Seth caught his breath as the man paused, for he had grown far more interested than he thought. Vainly he was trying to think who this man could be that had hated him so intensely.

"It still puzzles you!" came scornfully from the hidden lips. "You should—"

"Ha!" cried Seth. "I have it!"

"At last!"

"You are Worth Warwick!"

"Struck it that time, Seth Culver; I am the man once known as Worth Warwick."

"And you—you loved Agnes?"

"As I have told you."

"Why, I never dreamed of such a thing! We were like friends after I married her."

"That is true, but I had an object in my friendship."

"A treacherous one!"

"You are right, but I still longed to possess the peerless creature you called wife. I would have sold my soul to Satan if thus I could have purchased her!"

"You dastard!"

The masked man leaned forward and lightly smote the helpless giant's lips.

"Do not be too indiscreet, Seth Culver! Remember you are fully in my power. If I choose, I can end your life in a moment."

"I would never ask mercy, now that I know you for what you are."

"I do not doubt your courage. But I am not done with my story. There is more for you to hear—more that will make you squirm like the worm that is trodden upon. And I—I will laugh in your face! You can now understand the depth of my hatred."

"Man, you must be mad!"

"On this point I may be, but I have never tried to restrain my madness—I have let it take full control of me. I have longed for this moment when I could tell you what a sweet revenge I had upon you for robbing me of the only woman I ever loved. The time has come."

"Your wife deserted you—fled with Valois, your brother. You thought she had learned to love him better than you. That was where you made a big mistake. To this day she believes you were false to her; to this day Valois Culver believes the same. Had they not, they never would have fled together. Agnes loved you too truly; Valois was too honorable. You may wonder why they should believe anything so utterly unjust of you. I will reveal the secret: I taught them to believe! I placed manufactured proof before their eyes, and caused them to believe against their own wishes."

"You devil!" grated Seth, thoughtlessly giving a wrench at the bonds which he fully knew were too secure to be slipped or broken. "You infernal dastard!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WORTH WARWICK'S FOUL WORK.

"HA! ha! ha!" laughed the triumphant villain. "Now you are beginning to wiggle! I thought I could touch the spot! It is a bitter pill to swallow, but it must go down!"

"I will have your life for what you have done!" came through the giant's clinched teeth, as he ceased to struggle, his better judgment telling him how useless it was to do so.

"You say you will, but—will you? However, you have not heard all I have to say. There are more sweet morsels for you to chew upon."

"How did I work your despair—how did I carry out my scheme? First, by insinuations. I was apparently your trusted friend, but I managed to drop a word now and then where it would do the most good—or hurt. You did not drink much on those old days, though you sometimes indulged. I led you on and on, laying my plot with care. The time finally came for me to deliver the final blow."

"You know the night you went with me to the saloon—the last night you ever looked on the face of your wife. We drank wine; yours was drugged."

Again it seemed as if Seth was about to make an attempt to burst free, but he restrained himself. Warwick continued:

"When the drug had taken effect, you were placed on a couch. In that saloon there was the wax figure of a woman—a figure I had purchased for the occasion. That figure was placed on the couch beside you, and one of your arms was thrown over it. Then one of

my hired tools was sent for Valois Culver, and I directed him to bring your wife, if possible. He was a shrewd rascal who was slightly known to Valois, and he managed his part of the little game very finely. Both your brother and your wife were led to the saloon, though they knew not where they were going. They entered by a side-door. By the aid of some steps, they looked through a transom into the room where you appeared to be sleeping in another woman's arms. My hired tool took good care your wife should look first, fearing Valois would keep her from doing so, should he obtain first view. She fell fainting into his arms."

Seth Culver's breath came in hoarse, rasping gasps, and his whole gigantic frame was a quiver. Great drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and he could not crush back the bitter groan that rose to his lips.

Again the villain laughed.

"This is the hour I have longed for!" he declared, with fiendish triumph. "I knew it would come—I knew it!"

"You deserve the hottest corner in hell!" grated the tortured giant.

"Well, I can afford to suffer some for this satisfaction. I know not why my hatred should be so fierce after all these years, but fierce it is. In not the least has it diminished.

"But, speaking of the past—the sweet, sweet past!—in one thing I defeated myself. I did not dream Agnes would fly with Valois, but I had planned to induce her to go away with me. I felt certain she would not stay to meet you again, so I arranged to have you kept under the influence of the drug for three days. When twenty-four hours had passed, I would call on Agnes with a well-arranged tale of discovering your perfidy. Then I would play my boldest card; then I would try to get her to fly with me. Strangely enough, I had scarcely entertained a thought of failure.

"Twenty-four hours passed. Then I discovered your wife had already fled, and Valois was with her. Even then I did not think myself defeated, for I fancied she had gone only a short distance to avoid meeting you when you returned home. Valois would return, and in some way I would discover through him just where Agnes was. Valois did not return, and for years I did not rest my eyes on the face of the woman I had so madly loved.

"You know what followed your recovery from the stupor into which the drug threw you. I will not go over that, though it might add a morsel to my satisfaction in seeing your feelings pictured on your face.

"You know I soon disappeared, but you did not know I started out to search for Valois Culver and the woman I still coveted. My search lasted years, and I passed through many adventures. I never gave it over till success crowned my efforts, though, all unconsciously I supposed, the feelings of my heart were undergoing a change. When, at last, I found the man and woman over yonder in the Devil's Mountains, I was amazed that I felt no desire to kill him. But my amazement was still greater when I found I no longer loved the woman as I had in the past. She was still beautiful, though there was a sad light in her eyes, but she was nothing to me. Of the old passions, the only thing left in my heart was hatred for you—and that seemed intensified!

"I have told you I dreamed of the hour when I should have you helpless at my feet, as you are now, and tell you how I had ruined your life. Still I kept from you for years, during which time something seemed urging me to find you and strike another blow. Just what that blow would be I did not know.

"The time came when I could withstand the impulse no longer. I went back to the civilized world and sought for you. One of my tools was with me. I found you at last, and, to my amazement, I found with you a beautiful girl you called your daughter. By inquiry, I learned she was a child of adoption. I saw you idolized her, and another plan formed in my head. I would kidnap her!"

"And it is to you, you fiend, I owe this second sorrow of my life!" hoarsely cried Seth Culver.

"Quite right; I was the man who planned it all. I left the forged note which made you believe the deed was performed by your brother. You know I used to be cunning with the pen in the old days, and I assure you my hand has lost none of its craft. I imitated your brother's writing, and I laid the trail that led you to Arizona. What for? For this hour!"

The masked villain paused, fully enjoying his cruel triumph as he stared at the torture-contorted face of the helpless giant. He pressed his hands together and chuckled in an evil manner, seeming scarcely human in his fiendish glee. In truth, he was one out of whose breast all tender passions had been driven by the great overwhelming hatred he felt for the man who had not intentionally done him the least wrong. Seth Culver came nearer the truth than he knew when he said Worth Warwick must be mad. On one point, at least, the man was deranged.

"I am helpless in your power, now, Worth Warwick," came slowly from the Goliath's lips;

"but God pity you if you let me free and I ever place my hands on you!"

"It is a part of my revenge to have you live," declared the vengeful wretch. "If you died now, you would forget what you have lost through me, thus my vengeance would end. Oh, no! I will not kill you now, Seth; though the time may come when my hand will end your life."

"If not now, never!"

"You say so, but that does not make it so. Who controls the hands of fate?"

"Worth Warwick, what have you done with my child?"

"Oh, she is safe—safe in my power."

"What have you done with her?"

"You ask the question, it is my privilege to answer—or not. But I can tell you what I am going to do with her. That will heap still another glowing coal on your already scorched heart."

"Dare to harm her and I will make you suffer the tortures of the damned!"

"Oh, I will not harm her—oh, no! But I'll tell you what I will do—I will make her my wife!"

CHAPTER XX.

DONE BY RED HANDS.

THE fury expressed by Silver-edged Seth's glowing eyes and working face was something terrible to witness, but it seemed to fill the soul of the evil man bending over him with the keenest delight. Again Worth Warwick laughed with evil triumph, nodding his satisfaction as he saw his victim give one more mighty wrench at the tough rawhide cord which held him helpless.

"My tools did their work well, Seth," came from behind the sable mask. "They knew the man they had to deal with, and they knew me better than to make a botch of the job. You could not get away of your own efforts, though you had a year to try."

Culver realized the truth of these taunting words, and again he gave over that mad effort, a sigh of rage and despair finding utterance.

"Oh, but I have touched you to your very heart's core!" sneered the triumphant villain. "In one short hour I have caused you as much pain as I have suffered in years! That ought to be enough—it would be enough for one who hated less intensely than I; but my hatred is a part of my life. I enjoy it! I shall never be satisfied till I know there is no possible chance of causing you further pain!"

"You miserable wretch!"

"Hard words never broke any bones, and to tell the truth, I rather like to hear them from your lips. It is pleasant to know I have done something to merit them. And I have—oh, I have! It is pleasant to think of the hours, days, years of torture you will endure from this on, now you know how your wife was deceived into deserting you even while she loved you."

"Man, man! of what can your heart be made?"

"It was like other hearts years ago, but it is now harder than flint. All tenderness is forever banished from it so far as you are concerned. It causes me to laugh when I think how you will writhe as you think of your wife putting your image from her heart and learning to love your brother. For she has tried to forget you, and she has learned to love him."

The breast of the helpless giant rose and fell like the billows of a storm-tossed sea. Drops of sweat actually rolled from his forehead.

"And this fair girl—Lois, I think you call her—she is to become mine. She is—"

"Stop, Worth Warwick! That girl is as innocent as a flower! If you harm her, the hand of God will not be withheld from your thrice-accursed head!"

"Those words sound well, Seth; but sound is all there is to them. I have long since ceased to believe there is a God, so you need not hope to frighten me by speaking of Him. Even if such a Being exists, He has no thought of us poor worms—He cares nothing for our little passions, our sins, our sufferings. He has other business to attend to than avenging the wrongs of a human being that is no more than a worm to Him. You will have to strike another lay if you wish to terrify me, Seth."

But the giant's lips remained closed, for Seth Culver saw how useless it was to waste words with the soulless wretch. He also saw how his visible emotion filled the man's heart with delight, and he made a mighty effort to gain control of his shaken nerves. In a measure he was successful, though he could not quite assume the air he wished.

Warwick bent forward to peer into the captive's changed face, laughing harshly, as he noted the change.

"So you have decided to hold yourself in check, have you, Seth? You have begun to fancy I was having too much sport. Well, I will not deny having enjoyed it. In fact, I fancy I have made that pretty plain ere this. No matter how placid your face may be, I shall still understand how your heart is burning with fury. But I love to see you wiggle, and I still have another card to play."

He arose to his feet, giving a low, peculiar whistle that quickly brought one of his satellites to his side. Warwick spoke a few low words to the man, who instantly turned away and was soon lost in the darkness.

Then the chief villain returned and squatted beside the motionless giant. After regarding Seth's face searchingly for a few seconds, he again broke into that laugh of malignant delight.

"You are wondering what my next card is," he said. "Well, suppose I tell you, while it is being brought up by the fellow who has been sent for it. It is the girl!"

"Lois?"

"You have struck it, Seth. She is not so very far away. I am going to give her a chance to speak with you, then I shall hear her from you."

"You devil!"

"I believe I have heard you make that remark before. It is getting a trifle stale, my dear friend. Suppose you set your brain at work to discover some other ignominious appellation that will fit my head."

"That is the most suitable one in the list, for if you are not a devil, such a thing does not exist!"

"Well, you have had the satisfaction of expressing your mind freely on that point, at least. Devil it shall be, if that pleases you. I do not mind."

And Seth knew he spoke the truth. If anything, he rather delighted in the title.

"Before many more hours pass," continued the triumphant plotter, "little Lois shall be mine. We will be man and wife. That must drive another arrow to the center of your heart, and that heart is surely well riddled by what has gone before."

"Do you think she will consent? Do you think she will marry the man whom she knows to be a dastard? She will not do that, even to save her own life!"

"But her honor, dear sir—a woman will do anything to preserve that."

He could not have aimed a more telling blow, for, despite his resolve to restrain himself, the Goliath squirmed beneath the cruel cut, giving his enemy cause to laugh again.

"If you harm her," came hoarsely from the Silver-edged Sport's lips, "I will have your blood, drop by drop, every particle there is in your dastardly body!"

"That sounds savage," nodded the mask; "but it seems a trifle ridiculous so long as you remain in your present condition. You are not in shape to take anybody's blood."

"But other days are coming."

"I trust so."

"You may yet be in my power, as I am in yours at this moment. If that time comes, may God have mercy on you!"

"I shall expect none from you."

"Then you will not be disappointed."

"You would kill me?"

"There is no doubt about it."

Warwick flung out a hand.

"You will never have the chance, for it is written I shall kill you in the end. But the end is far, far ahead. It will only be reached after you have drained the cup to its dregs. Another bitter pill to swallow is soon to come."

"I have warned you concerning Lois."

"And your warning amounts to that," snapping his fingers in Seth's face. "I hardly fancy she will be hard to subdue, but should she prove so, my first threat to hold over her head will be the promise of torture to you. That will bring her to her senses, I fancy."

Thus Worth Warwick held the rod of torture over his powerless victim while he waited for the return of his messenger. The time passed slowly, but the man finally returned in hot haste. As he came dashing up, the chief villain saw that he was alone, and sprung to his feet with a half-smothered exclamation of astonishment and anger.

"What is the matter, Gilson?" he sharply demanded. "Where is the girl?"

And the man replied:

"Boss, ther gal's gone!"

"Gone?" and three strides carried the chief to the side of his mounted satellite, his hand rudely grasping the man's arm. "Gone? What do you mean?"

"Jest w'at I said, boss," was the positive assurance. "She hain't thar."

"Where is Hutch Terry, her guard?"

"He's thar, boss—dead as hay!"

For a moment Warwick was too astounded to speak, then he savagely snarled out a cry of fury, almost dragging Gilson from the saddle.

"Are you speaking the truth, you dog?"

"Ther bald-headed truth, boss!"

"But I cannot understand it. Who could have killed Terry?"

"I 'lows it wuz reds."

"Indians?"

"You've named 'em."

"What makes you think so?"

"Wal, if ever I saw er man thet wuz tommyhawked and skelped thet man wuz Hutch Terry! He's clean snuffed out, an' ther job wuz done by red hands!"

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT SHANKS AND SCRAGGS SAW.

IN the excitement following the raid on the hacienda and the stampede of the horses from the corral, no one noticed the strange pair, the actor and poet, who were astir with the others, but kept somewhat in the background.

"Why all this stir?" asked the actor, of his companion. "In me sleep I fancied I heard strange and terrible sounds which caused me blood to grow a-chill and me heart to cease its natural vibrations. I awoke from delightful dreams to find the awesome sounds were a fearful reality. There were cries, shouts, blasphemings and the discharge of firearms. I arose from me couch, laid me hand on me trusty pistol and crept cautiously forth."

"It is the truth you speak," agreed the poet; "but I might have slept through it all, I'll confess, had you not kicked me in the chest as you struggled from the cot. That aroused me to my surroundings, but I came near destroying you, thinking you some base assassin who had crept into my chamber."

"I know thou didst, for thy head was quickly drawn beneath the blanket which served as our covering through the night. Still I am troubled to know why thou *wentest* beneath that covering."

"My friend so dear, the cause is clear. I was looking for a good chance to get hold of the blanket ere I cast it over your head and smothered you."

"The explanation is satisfactory."

After a time they discovered what had happened, and learned of the preparations for pursuit of the cattle-thieves.

"My dear Scraggs."

"My dear Shanks?"

"Shall we join ourselves to this clan of warriors bold?"

"I favor it. A dash through the night on the back of a fiery, untamed steed will fill my bosom with fresh inspiration. On the morrow, perchance, I shall be able to turn off a yard or so of poetry."

"Then let us hasten; there is no time for delay."

But on arriving at the stables, they discovered all the horses had been taken.

"By me faith!" dramatically cried the actor, striking an attitude. "Only our well-ridden mules are left, Brother Scraggs!"

"Alas, alas!"

"Are we thus doomed to bitter and blighting disappointment? Are these wild robbers who roam the mysterious night to escape us thus?"

"No—a thousand times No!"

"These mules must do their duty."

"Quite true."

Then they began saddling the mules in hot haste. But, swiftly as they worked, the pursuers were off before they left the stable.

"We're left!" sighed Scraggs.

"Which is slang," asserted Shanks. "As you have set the example, I will declare *I am never left!* Follow me!"

Then the actor thumped the sides of the mule so hard with his heels that the animal dashed away into the darkness, uttering a hoarse "hee-haw." The poet followed.

For a time they were enabled to keep to the proper course, being guided by the sounds of the stampede and pursuit, but it soon became plain the mules were no match for the horses ridden by the cowboys.

"Can it be we are thus to be baffled?" cried the tragedian. "Shade of William Shakespeare, how harrowing!"

"Harrowing, indeed!" agreed the poet. "We shall have no chance to show our valor this night."

"Those robbers will escape our clutch."

"And well for them will it be."

"They could expect no quarter at our hands."

"True, true! We have not even a dime left!"

"For one time, at least, you have robbed an expression of its poetry."

"Then I fear I took it too literally."

"You did."

Gradually the sounds which had guided them became fainter and fainter till at last there was nothing of the kind on which they could depend.

"What shall we do, Brother Scraggs?"

"You say, Brother Shanks."

"I fancy I can still keep the proper course."

"Then shall we continue the pursuit?"

"We may be in time to render the cause of justice a helping hand."

"Then it is our duty to go on."

Thus the question was settled, and with only the judgment of the actor to guide them, they rode through the night, little dreaming how foolish they were.

But the time was not far distant when they were to realize their folly. After a while, they halted to listen.

"What canst thou hear, brother?" asked Shanks.

"Naught but the throbbing of my own heart."

"We are alone."

"I fear we are lost!"

"Lost!"

Then their true situation was revealed to them, for they were indeed lost in the darkness that shrouded the plain, and they knew not which way to turn.

"Oh, the horror of our situation!" gasped the poet.

"It is truly something dreadful to contemplate!" acknowledged the actor.

"What shall we do?"

"A question me lips cannot answer."

Thus they were at fault. For a long time they discussed the situation in a gloomy manner, each inclined to blame the other for their misfortune. Once they were on the point of a quarrel, but the outbreak was averted. After comparing opinions as to the proper course to pursue in order to reach the ranch, they decided on a direction that took them almost straight from it and, at the same time, quite out of the course followed by the cowboys in pursuit of the cattle-thieves.

"Never again will I allow myself to be drawn into such folly," asserted the tragedian. "Hereafter, I will depend more on me own sound judgment."

"Ditto here," promptly declared the rhymester. "Had I followed the dictation of my brain, I would not have left the ranch."

"Had you followed the dictation of your fears, you would have remained with your head under the blanket, where you thrust it when you heard the sounds outside the ranch."

"Fears! Do you speak to me of fears?"

"Methinks you understood."

"I did, unworthy comrade!"

"Tis well, base poltroon!"

"Ha! that is too much!"

"What wouldst thou do?"

"Have your blood!"

"Come on, knave!"

Once more they halted and sat glaring at each other through the darkness. Both were angry, but neither cared to fight. After a time, the actor uttered a contemptuous grunt and again started his mule forward, leaving the poet to follow or not, as he chose.

"Go on!" cried Scraggs. "I am done with you forever, and I am glad thus to get rid of you."

But, when he saw Shanks really meant to leave him, his fears overcame his anger, and he made haste to follow. To tell the truth, Shanks was greatly relieved when he heard the poet hurrying to overtake him.

For a long time they rode side by side without speaking, but at last they patched up a truce once more and became friends. But both were anxious over their situation, and, instead of settling down and waiting for daylight to show them where the hacienda lay, they kept moving anxiously onward, hoping fortune would set them aright. Once they fancied they detected the distant report of a firearm, but neither was certain about that.

Finally, most unexpectedly, they came upon a deep ravine—deep for the nature of the ground. Soft exclamations of surprise broke from their lips, for in the depths of the ravine they detected the glimmer of a small fire. A slight change in their position showed them two figures within the circle of firelight, and, to their amazement, one was a female.

"Immortal Shakespeare!"

"Undying Burns!"

"What is this me eyes behold?"

"A maiden fair, 'tis plain."

"And with her—"

"One of the coarser sex."

"What meaneth it?"

"That I cannot tell."

"The maid seems under surveillance of yon base knave. Can it be she is a captive?"

"It surely has that aspect."

"Then we must to her rescue! See! she is pleading to him—pleading, perchance, for her life. Is your pistol in working order, brother?"

"It is."

They were about to leave their mules and creep down into the ravine when they discovered several dusky figures in the shadows beyond the camp-fire.

"Ha!" gasped Scraggs. "What are those?"

"Human beings, by me faith!" answered Shanks, cautiously.

"They cannot be friends of the man down there, for see! They are creeping cautiously up behind the unconscious fellow! It must be they are coming to the aid of the maiden! They mean to spring upon the man and overpower him!"

"But see how cautiously they creep! They are careful to let neither man nor maid become aware of their approach. Perhaps we ought to warn those down there."

"By heavens!"

"What is it?"

"I believe those creeping figures are Indians!"

"Goodness! you are right! The man *must* be warned!"

"We may lose our own lives by doing so!"

"But think of the girl!"

They were on the point of shouting to the unsuspecting man, when, with remarkable suddenness, three of the creeping figures darted forward. One seized the girl and smothered her cries, while the other two leaped on the man,

one of them bringing a hatchet down on his head, killing him with a single blow!

Then, before the eyes of the horrified actor and poet, the scalp was torn from the murdered man's head!

Only a moment did the red wretches pause to rifle the body, for it was plain they feared the man had friends in that vicinity. When their dastardly work was done, they hastily retreated into the darkness, taking the maiden with them, a captive, and leaving a mutilated, ghastly corpse stretched beside the little camp-fire in the ravine!

CHAPTER XXII.

TO WHAT FATE?

THE man and girl who had been seen beside the camp-fire, all unconscious of the fate creeping upon them, were a cowboy known as Hutch Terry and Seth Culver's adopted daughter, Lois.

The cowboy was a rough, brutal-appearing fellow, whose face was far from pleasant to look upon.

Lois looked pale and sad, her eyes plainly showing traces of tears, though she was bearing up bravely just then. Her hands and her feet were free, but she knew how closely Hutch Terry was watching her every movement.

For some time she sat looking into the flames of the little camp-fire, but she finally resolved to make another appeal to her guard, for she had already appealed to him, only to be rudely rebuffed. Slowly she turned her blue eyes upon Terry. The man had been watching her, but his gaze refused to encounter hers.

"Will nothing move you, sir?" cried Lois, despairingly. "Have you no heart?"

Terry grunted, but made no other reply.

"You are a man," continued the maiden, "and it cannot be you will willingly see me suffer so much!"

"Suffer—stuff!" and Terry spat viciously in the fire. "You shemales seem awful tender w'en ye'r' gals, but you git monstr'us tough w'en ye grow ter wimmin—you jest do!"

"Do you doubt my suffering?"

"Oh, you may feel er dite womblecropped, but you'll kem roun' all right in ther eend, fer thar hain't no 'arthly reason w'y ye sh'u'dn't. Suffer! Waugh! I courted er gal oncet, an' I sw'ar she wuz 'tarnal nigh as poorty as you be! She seemed so tender an' dellicat thet it didn't seem like thar wuz much of her anyhow. I uster be 'fraid ter tetch her lest I'd break her. But she outgrewed that tenderness, you bet!"

As Lois did not speak, he went on:

"I merried her, an' it wuzn't more'n er y'ar 'fore she knocked me down with er rollin'-pin—an' she wuz so tender an' dellicat! I hain't 'lowin' she didn't hev good reason, fer I wuz drunk, I reckon, an' I 'tempted ter crowd her some. Arter thet she bekem er perfec' terror on trucks. She'd snatch me silly ev'ry time I got off my feet with drink—an' she so tender an' dellicat! She jest ruled ther roost, an' thar never wuz a man as wuz tougher. Things wuz run 'bout as she 'lowed they'd oughter be. She tuck ter drinkin', an' she'd down more'n I c'u'd ter save me—an' she so tender an' dellicat! Humph! Waugh! Fush!"

Having thus expressed his contempt of anything "so tender an' dellicat," Terry bit off a huge chew of tobacco.

"She sloped," he added, after a time—"she sloped with Ans Budlow, an' I wuz derved glad ter git rid of her."

Seeing how useless it was to appeal to such a man, Lois formed a desperate resolve to try to break from him, though she had attempted it once before and met with defeat.

But it seemed as if Terry read her thoughts, for he growled:

"Don't ye make er break, gal! 'Tain't no good, an' I'd only hev ter use ye er leetle wuss then is good fer one so tender an' dellicat. Keep stiddy, you!"

Lois was ready to burst into tears, but she bravely kept them back. After a time, she said:

"I do not understand what these cruel men have against me. I was snatched from my father—"

"Oh, come now! Taos Tom 'lows he is your daddy!"

"That wretch!"

"He says he kin prove it. How do you know he hain't? You never saw yer dad, you tole me. He kem West ter make his fortune afore ye wuz born, an' he never kem back. How do you know Taos Tom hain't ther man?"

"My heart tells me he is not."

"Thet hain't no proof."

"It is proof enough. Had he been my father, he would have boldiy said so at first, instead of kidnapping me from my home. If he were my father, he would not allow me to be dragged over the country in this way, confined in a damp room with walls of stone, like a cavern, then brought out here into the night—for what purpose?"

"Thet's fer ther boss ter say. I dunno w'at he bod ye brung hyer ter-night fer."

"The boss!—who is this boss who seems to be at the bottom of all this wickedness?"

"Now don't you say I ever tole ye! I think

too derved much of my ole hide! He's got some use fer ye, 'cept he'd never hed ye hyer."

"Which proves Taos Tom simply a tool of this cowardly boss who remains in the back-ground and does not dare show himself!" her eyes flashing scornfully. "The wretch at the bottom of all this must be a contemptible creature indeed!"

"Mebbe you think so now, but I reckon he'll bring ye ter a diff'runt 'pinion. He hes er mighty winnin' way, else ther leetle Spanish gal'd never been all bruck up over him. Reckon he paid Taos Tom well fer ye."

"And would a father sell his own child? That proves the ruffian no parent of mine!"

"Hev it that way ef it suits ye best; I don't keer."

Lois suddenly fell on her knees before the man and began pleading for him to befriend her—to aid her in escaping her enemies. She promised him a great reward—much more than he could hope to receive from being true to his "boss." The eyes of the greedy wretch glowed with avarice, but he slowly shook his head.

"Tain't er derved bit of use!" came harshly from his lips. "It jest can't be did! Ef I durst, ther promise of big pay might temt me; but I think too much of my life—an' I know Devil Don!"

In their earnestness neither of them saw the creeping figures which, snake-like, were approaching foot by foot. Little did the ruffianly cowboy dream his very seconds of life were numbered—he was doomed!

Seeing how utterly hopeless her situation was, Lois sunk down, covering her white face with her hands. It was that act which gave the savages the very chance they were longing for, and they darted swiftly forward, being behind Hutch Terry. Down came the hatchet in the hand of one of them, cleaving the ruffian's brain!

The girl heard the sound of that death-dealing blow and looked up, but even as she did so, she was clutched by a strong pair of hands and her cry of horror smothered.

"Gal no holler!" hissed the red rascal who had seized her. "Gal holler, Injun cut 'um throat!"

The threat was wasted, for the sudden shock caused by the sight of seeing the slaughter of the man she had been talking with a moment before was enough to cause her senses to reel and unconsciousness seized her for a time.

She did not see the horrible scalping of the unfortunate rascal; she knew not when she was lifted and borne away into the darkness.

When she became conscious once more, she found herself upon the back of a moving horse, held there by a pair of strong naked arms. At first she was so dazed she did not remember what had happened, but after a moment the full horror of her situation rushed upon her like the surge of a mighty wave, causing a low moan to come from her lips.

The Indian who held her on the horse started and uttered a guttural grunt of satisfaction, then he said, speaking in a guarded tone:

"Gal keep still, not be hurt; gal squeal, git hurt—bad!"

Lois shuddered as she felt a hand creep up toward her throat, as if to choke her into silence if she shrieked. The impulse to use her voice was strong upon her, but she resisted it with all her strength.

When her nerves were somewhat steadier, she looked around to discover how many there were of her captors. This she was unable to determine, but she discovered there were more than the three who participated in her capture. They were moving silently through the night, the unshod feet of their ponies making but little sound on the soft cushion of grass.

For some time they moved forward in that manner. Suddenly, at a signal from one of the party, all came to a halt, sitting like graven images on their little horses. A broad hand was placed over the captive's mouth just as she discerned some moving figures near at hand. Into her ear that ominous warning was again hissed:

"No keep still, kill 'um!"

She felt sure there were friends near by, yet she dared not utter a sound, feeling it would be the height of folly to do so.

Fortunately for the red-skins, they were not detected, and the unknown riders moved on to disappear in the darkness.

Not till they had passed beyond hearing did the Indians move forward again. Then they advanced with the greatest caution, plainly being aware there were several parties of cowboys abroad on the plain.

But for all of their caution, they finally came upon another band, and this time they did not escape observation.

"Halt, pards!" cried a strong voice. "Thar's some kind of critters yon ter ther right. Ef its any of ther boys, they hain't guv ther signal."

Then the speaker uttered a peculiar whistle.

For a moment the red-skins seemed to hesitate what to do. Had they not possessed a captive, there would have been no hesitation. But the decision came quickly, and Lois felt she was doomed. The Indians could not escape with her so they would leave her behind—a corpse!

The hand of her captor sought his knife, just as a cowboy cried:

"They're enemies! Let 'em hev, pards!"

And he accompanied the words with a shot.

That shot saved Lois Culver's life!

With a horrible yell, the red-skin upon the horse with her flung up his arms and pitched headlong to the ground, death-stricken! It happened the girl was not dragged down, but the horse was alarmed. With a snort, it wheeled to go dashing over the plain, bearing the girl in its mad flight.

To what fate?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAZEPPA RIDE TO DOOM.

WORTH WARWICK was furious. Bitter language fell from his concealed lips, and he fiercely stamped his feet on the ground, then beat his clinched hands together.

"Satan seize the luck!" he raved. "Are you sure you are telling the truth, Gilson? Don't dare tell me a lie, unless you are looking for a quick passage over the Dead Range!"

"I am telling you nothing but the truth, boss," the cowboy firmly declared. "I foun' ther fire still burnin' an' Terry's skelpless body layin' nigh it. It wuz ther work of red devils as wuz fools enough ter leave their sign ahind."

"What sign?"

"Ther skelpless head of Terry wuz sign enough."

"You are right; but there is no Indian war going on. I wonder at the daring of the red curs! And now they have the girl—they have robbed me of her and a portion of my sweet revenge! Did you examine the body, Gilson? How long had Terry been dead?"

"I didn't stop fer no 'zaminin', boss," confessed the cowboy; "fer I didn't know but ther ther redimps wuz layin' clost fer me. W'en I saw w'at hed happened, I says ter myself, says I: 'Jock Gilson, you'd best git right peert ef you don't want ter keep Terry company.' An' you bet I got!"

"I would give something to know how much time has passed since the man was killed and the girl carried off. Oh, such beastly luck! I wish every red-skin in existence was in the hottest depths of the fiery pit! That is where they ought to be!"

"Kirect, boss!"

"We must try to find the red fiends, avenge our comrade and recover the girl. Gilson, send in Gila Jack and Mint, while you go call the boys at The Knob. Tell them what has happened, and say I want them immediately. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, lose not an instant of time! Away!"

With the final word, the chief waved his hand and Gilson reined his horse round sharply, giving the animal a touch of the spurs. As he passed the spot where Mint and Jack were awaiting orders, he cried that they were wanted by the boss.

As soon as the cowboy tough wheeled away, Worth Warwick returned to a crouching position beside the helpless giant.

Silver-edged Seth had heard every word which passed between the chief and his satellite, but he was inclined to think it was another trick to put him to still greater torture. Warwick's anger seemed genuine, but for all that, the man might be acting. The giant steeled his nerves to meet what he expected would follow.

For several moments the revengeful wretch was silent, as he crouched by the side of the man he hated so fiercely, but his right eye still gleamed strangely through one of the twin holes in the sable mask.

Hearing the sound of advancing feet behind him, Warwick turned to find his satellites close at hand.

"Stop there!" he said. "When I am ready I will call you."

They promptly obeyed.

"I suppose you heard the news brought by my man?" said the chief, again turning on the captive Goliath.

"Oh, cert."

Warwick seemed taken aback by the promptness and coolness of the reply, and he lowered his face still further, that he might give Seth Culver's countenance a closer scrutiny.

"You fool!" he cried. "You think it is not true?"

"Have I said so?"

"Yes—in voice and manner."

"Well, let it go at that then."

"You think it a scheme to give you further torture?"

"If so, it is a most miserable failure."

"If it is the truth—what?"

The giant laughed.

"It is useless to look at it in that light. But, whether it is the truth or not, you have failed to add another pang."

"But the girl—this girl you love as your own child—she is in the hands of brutal savages!"

"That being true, her condition has scarcely changed for the worse."

"What do you mean?"

"I should fancy my meaning was plain enough. You did not use to be so dull of comprehension, Warwick."

"You mean the savages are no worse captors than I?"

"Ah! I fancied you would be able to get at the truth. You are not so dull as you would have me believe."

"Look here, Seth Culver," and the speaker held a finger before the Goliath's eyes; "I am going to tell you this on my word of honor—"

A short, hard laugh interrupted him.

"Honor! Worth Warwick, you do not know the meaning of the word! Honor! I scarcely believe there was ever a particle of honor in your black heart! Honor! If you ever possessed any, it has gone with your manhood—to the devil!"

For a moment the villain was silenced; then, with an exclamation of anger, his fingers beat a sharp tattoo on those boldly scornful lips.

"Your tongue is sharp—as sharp as you seem to fancy my wits are dull. You should hold it in check, Culver, or it may lead you into worse trouble than you are now. If you will not believe me on my word of honor, I will simply give you my word that this is no game to cause you an additional pang. Gilson would not dare deceive me, and therefore this girl must have fallen into the hands of a band of wandering Apaches. What her fate will be you can imagine."

Seth remained silent.

"I shall try to find the reds and rescue the girl, for I have taken a fancy to her. What matters it though I have several wives living? She will make another as charming as the best of them! But I will freely confess the chance of ever seeing her again is small indeed. The red devils have done their work, and by morning they will be far away, carrying her with them. That must fill your mind with pleasant thoughts!"

"I am not sure but her fate will be more acceptable than if she had remained in your power."

"If that is the way you look at it, I have not another word to say."

The chief arose to his feet, calling to his waiting men. They came promptly forward, leading the giant's horse.

"The boys will be here soon, and we have work before us," spoke the mask. Then he explained to them what had happened to Terry and the girl.

"That knocks out a portion of my plans," he said. "Of course we must make a hot hunt for the redimps, though there is little chance of finding them. We cannot leave this dog of a giant here, so we will take him along."

"How's it ter be did, boss?" inquired Jack.

"He must be bound on the back of his own horse."

"But how you goin' ter putt him thar? I don't reckon you propose ter set his feet free? W'y, dern' ther big critter! ef his feet wuz freed, he'd like ez not bu'st loose an' raise thunder!"

"We will tie him prostrate on the animal's back, and will not release him at all."

This suited the cowboys, and Seth was quickly lifted from the ground to the back of his horse, the three men finding that no easy task, although the giant did not offer to struggle. In a short time he was secured at full length upon the animal's back.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the chief. "What a fine Mazeppa he would make! How do you fancy your position, Seth Culver?"

The Silver-edged Sport did not reply.

"Is it a case of sulks now?" sneered Warwick.

"Well, I will make your situation still more pleasant by placing a blindfold over your eyes. Some of my jolly boys would not care to have you scrutinizing their faces."

He produced a heavy black handkerchief and carefully secured it over the eyes of the helpless giant. When this was completed, he laughed again, with satisfaction.

"Now we will away," he cried, swinging into the saddle of his own horse, his men mounting their animals at the same time. "We will meet the boys."

A moment later they were in motion.

In a short time they were joined by several others, being the party for which Gilson had been sent. Taos Tom and Crook nose Chet were among the others.

A short consultation was held, and it was decided to make an attempt to find the savages who had murdered Terry, though all understood how small the chance of success was. First, they would visit the ravine where Gilson declared he had discovered Terry's body.

They had not proceeded far before Taos Tom discovered several stationary figures to the right of them. Instantly he called to his comrades to halt, immediately challenging the unknown party.

By a most extraordinary stroke of fortune they had come upon the Indians with whom Lois Culver was a captive!

Taos Tom had been drinking, else he would never have followed his challenge so swiftly by a shot; but it was fortunate for the captive girl he did, as that shot saved her life.

With a death yell, the bullet-stricken savage fell to the ground, and the horse bearing the girl wheeled and dashed away, Lois clinging desperately on its back.

"Holy thunder!" shouted Gila Jack. "It's ther red devils!"

Just then it did not seem to occur to one of them that the figure on the back of the flying horse which so quickly vanished in the darkness was the person they sought, else they might have whirled in pursuit, leaving the savages to themselves.

Scarcely had the unlucky red-skin struck the ground before he was grasped by a comrade and flung across the back of a pony, where he lay shuddering out the last moments of his life as his comrades dashed away to escape the vengeful white men.

But the savages were prompt in returning the fire of the cowboys, sending Jock Gilson down to rise no more. Then, with defiant yells, they dropped along the sides of their ponies, and the hardy little animals skurried into the gloom like so many rats, one of them bearing a double burden, its living master and the dead comrade slain by Taos Tom's bullet.

"Riddle them!" shouted the chief, setting the example by opening fire with a revolver in each hand.

Then a score of bright flashes showed the grim faces of the rustler band, and a perfect rattle of firearms awoke the echoes of the night. A shower of lead was sent after the flying Indians, but not another savage was touched.

Silver-edged Seth's horse was accustomed to firearms, but at that moment something frightened him in a most unaccountable manner. With a snort of terror, he wheeled, snatching the rein from the hand of the cowboy who had been leading him. In another moment he was dashing wildly away, bearing the helpless, blindfolded man on his back.

The chief saw this, and in a moment everything but the safety of the man he so bitterly hated was forgotten.

"Here, men!" he shouted. "Let the red whelps go now! Satan scorch the luck! After the giant, every man!"

He set the example by leading the pursuit, and his well-trained men were quick to obey. Then began a wild race through the darkness of an Arizona night. The dead comrade of these lawless men was deserted where he had fallen, forgotten for the time.

"What vile luck!" raved the chief, tearing the mask from his face, as if it smothered him. "Everything seems going at cross-purposes just now! We must overtake that horse in some way, if we are forced to kill our animals under us!"

It happened that Culver's powerful steed had headed straight toward the mountains. The helpless man on the horse's back made no attempt to calm the animal by speaking to it.

"I will wait till Cyclone has left them behind," he thought. "My fate can scarcely be worse than it would have been had I remained in the hands of Worth Warwick. If this bandage was removed from my eyes, I might guide the creature back to the hacienda by my voice when it comes morning—and morning is not so very far away. I must work the blindfold off some way."

He found that was easier said than done, for Warwick had placed the bandage there to stay.

For nearly an hour the race continued, and what a wild race it was! Gradually the more poorly mounted ruffians fell behind, but the chief still kept the lead.

From a rolling plain the ground became more rugged and broken. The leading villain suddenly discovered the point toward which the fear-blinded horse of the Giant Mazeppa was heading, and he turned to those at his side, fairly screaming:

"On, on, ye devils! Kill your horses! That infernal beast must be stopped soon, or man and horse will go to the bottom of Skeleton Cut!"

The blindfolded man was riding straight to doom!

Fiercely men and master tried to urge their horses to overtake the frightened steed, but their efforts were in vain.

The darkness was denser among the hills, and the fleeing horse saw no sign of the black chasm till he was on the very verge.

Too late to pause or wheel!

With a scream that was almost human in its sudden horror, the noble animal leaped straight out in the air and then went plunging down, down into the darkness which shrouded the depths of Skeleton Cut, the helpless, blindfolded giant still bound rigidly on the creature's back!

Worth Warwick reined in his foaming steed on the very brink of the chasm. For several seconds he stared down into the darkness which hid the result of that horrible leap to death, his lips working, but no sound issuing from them. Finally, he hoarsely muttered:

"Thus ends my vengeance! Death has cheated me from making it complete!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOUND AND LOST.

FORTUNE—or was it a Higher Power—guided the horse to which Lois Culver clung, and it turned straight toward the hacienda. The girl expected immediate pursuit, and was greatly surprised when she found there was none, a discovery she did not make, however, till after the exchange of shots between the Indians and whites.

Looking back over her shoulder, the girl saw no signs of the oncoming figures she expected; no one cried out to her; she was alone—and free! Within her heart she thanked God for her escape!

She saw the fiery little pony was either badly frightened or decidedly vicious, for it tossed its head and snorted angrily when she spoke to it. The simple bridle-rein of the pony's savage master was dangling beyond her reach.

Had not Lois been an excellent horsewoman she could not have kept her position on that saddleless back. As it was, her situation was precarious in the extreme, and several times she came near being thrown.

As the wild dash continued, she became more and more alarmed, finding her soothing words seemed rather to irritate the ugly pony than anything else.

Just how long that wild ride continued before terror unsealed her lips she could not afterward tell, but finally she began to cry for help, scarcely knowing what she did.

Yuma Yank and Loyal Kingdon had traveled slowly on their return to the ranch, allowing the doubly-burdened horse to walk the greater part of the way. When they reached the stables they paused to discuss what had occurred. Loyal being eager to secure fresh horses and attempt to find the cowboys who had set out after the rustlers and Yank counseling against it. Considerable time was spent in that manner, but at length Loyal gained his point.

Not till then did they learn there were not two fresh saddle-horses left in the stables. This discovery created another argument, and a large amount of time was wasted before they again arrived at an agreement.

The distance prevented them hearing the exchange of shots between the rustlers and Indians; but not long after they again started out from the ranch, they heard the cries uttered by the frightened girl clinging to the back of the runaway pony.

"What's that?" exclaimed Yank.

They drew rein and listened, hearing the sound again in a moment, it being much nearer at hand the second time.

"It sounds like a woman's cry!" declared Loyal, excitedly. "It is some one in distress!"

"Mebbe ye're right, boy."

The sounds came nearer and nearer, till they saw the pony and its rider. Then they both started in pursuit.

Loyal happened to be the better mounted, and he soon took the lead, but the tough little Indian pony was not to be easily overtaken.

Just how the race would have ended it is impossible to say had the pony kept its feet. But, suddenly, it stumbled, sending the girl over its head. In a moment it was up and away again, but the girl lay still, somewhat stunned.

Loyal saw that fall, and his heart leaped into his mouth, for he fully expected it meant broken bones, if not certain death. Reining in his horse, he was quickly on his knees beside the fallen girl.

"Thank God! she is not dead!" he cried, as he peered sharply into her face.

Then another exclamation broke from his lips, as he recognized her as the same girl he had seen in the Full Hand Saloon at Kicker's Bar!

"No, I am not dead," replied Lois, finding her tongue and stirring slightly, making an attempt to rise, but falling back into his arms.

Yuma Yank found them thus as he came up.

"Are you badly injured?" asked Loyal, anxiously.

"I cannot say, but I hope not," she answered.

"It was an awful shock."

Slowly she tried each limb, then sat up, declaring she did not believe she was hurt at all.

"But who are you gentlemen?" she asked.

"I do not remember having seen you before."

"We claim to be honest," assured Loyal;

"and we have seen you before this night. We saw you in a saloon at Kicker's Bar."

She looked at him again, then cried:

"I remember now! You came to my aid! How can I thank you?"

"You do not have to, for we did not succeed in aiding you. The putting out of the lights, and the fight which followed, quite defeated our good intentions."

"Yes; and I was dragged from the saloon, carried miles and miles upon a horse, blindfolded, taken into a cavern-like room, then removed from that in the night, to have my guard slain by savages, from whose hands I escaped on that pony by the sudden appearance of unknown white men, who fired upon them. That is the whole of my adventures in a few words. But you cannot imagine how delighted I am to know I have found friends at last! I am so glad I could hug you both!"

Loyal looked as if he would like the hugging, but Yuma Yank backed away so precipitately that he came near falling down.

After more explanations, the young man assisted the girl upon his horse, and they turned back toward the hacienda. As they moved along, with Yank riding near at hand, he explained how they came to be there, telling Lois Seth Culver was in the vicinity, information which filled her with amazement and delight, feelings she freely expressed in her frank and

charming manner. Long before the hacienda was reached, Loyal was completely infatuated with the girl.

Yuma Yank saw how things were running, and gravely shook his head.

"It may be all right," he thought; "but gals is curi's critters. I never c'u'd understan' 'em, an' I reckon ther most o' 'em don't 'mount ter shucks."

Still the round-shouldered old fellow admitted to himself this one might be an exception to the "general run."

It was not a great while before the hacienda was reached, and Loyal escorted Lois into the old Mexican building, leaving Yank to look after the horses. The old miner called after his young pard, jestingly:

"S'pose ye'll be right back, ter go holp hunt fer ther rustlers, won't ye?"

To which Loyal replied:

"No; I believe I will give that up for to-night."

"I knowed it!" chuckled Yank, as the young man and the maiden disappeared—"I knowed it! Clean gone! Plumb struck all in er heap! Head, heels an' heart in love with ther gal! Waal, thet's ther way it takes 'em, an' they all seem ter ketch it sooner or later, ef not before."

Lois was eager to await the return of her foster-father, and she endeavored to spend the time on the *azotea*, with Loyal as a companion. But for three days and nights she had scarcely slept at all, and overtaxed nature demanded recuperation. She was forced to leave the roof and retire to a room to which she was shown by a peon girl, having first bidden both Loyal and Yank good night.

For some time the two comrades discussed the recent exciting events, then they decided to get some sleep, expressing a desire to be called when the cowboys came in from their night hunt.

With the return of daylight, the cowboys came in, giving a report of ill success in finding the gang who attempted to run off the horses, but saying they had lost three of their number, from whom they had become separated in some unaccountable manner.

Those three were Gila Jack, Huff Mint and Jock Gilson.

To Yank and Loyal's eager inquiries concerning Silver-edged Seth, they declared they had not seen the Giant Sport since the turn of the stampede.

And Seth had gone with the three cowboys who were missing!

The old miner and his pard looked into each other's eyes and read a mutual fear.

"It's thet derved whelp o'er cow-puncher!" growled the round-shouldered veteran, drawing the young Denverite aside. "He's ther p'ison snake!"

"What do you think has happened?"

"Dunno; but my ole gizzard tells me it's suthin' crooked. Ther leetle gal will be so dumflicated!"

Loyal waited somewhat impatiently for Lois to appear, although he well knew she was in sad need of sleep. For some reason, he felt nervous about her, and, with the aid of Manuel Covote, an interpreter, he finally dispatched a peon girl to see if Miss Culver was still asleep.

In a short time the peon returned, looking mystified and alarmed, saying the girl was not in the room. In her hand she held a slip of paper she said she had found on the girl's bed.

His heart growing cold with a sudden foreboding of evil, Loyal seized the paper and scanned it. There was a single line of writing upon it, but that line was enough to cause Lyon Kingdon to stagger backward, uttering a hoarse cry of horror and rage, for it told him little Lois was in the power of a human fiend!

CHAPTER XXV.

MAJOR NAVRAIN REAPPEARS.

"W'AT is it, boy?" cried Yuma Yank, leaping forward as that ejaculation of horror passed Loyal Kingdon's lips. "W'at's ther row, pard?"

For reply, the young Denverite held the slip of paper toward the old miner.

Yank was not so illiterate as his language might lead one to suppose, and he could eagerly read writing. He grasped the paper and easily scanned the one line upon it. This is what he read:

"Compliments of Devil Don!"

"Thet critter!" grated Yank. "He has—"

"He has the girl—poor Lois!"

"But how'd he work ther game? how'd he git her 'thout stirrin' up ther hull ranch?"

Loyal shook his head.

"I've got ter see how it wuz done!" declared Yank. "Somebody lead ther way ter ther place whar she wuz corraled las' night. Come on, pard."

The young Denverite readily followed his uncouth comrade, and the peon girl, seeming to comprehend what they wanted, led the way to the apartment to which Lois had retired a short time before.

The door was open, and they entered at a motion from the girl.

A glance showed them the bed had not been opened.

"She didn't shell herself out her togs," asserted the old miner. "She jest flopped right down on ther top o' ther bed, an' so wuz all ready ter git up w'en ther Silver-edged Sport 'peared."

That was plain enough.

Yank examined the door, and discovered there was no way of fastening it on the inner side.

"She c'u'dn't protec' herself, pore gal; but I don't s'pose she thought of ary bit o' danger from ther inside o' ther ranch. Thar never no critter kem in through that barred window. It's derved queer how ther critter got inter ther place anyhow."

"The gate was not barred when we came in last night."

"That's so."

"They are in the habit of keeping it barred, but they were strangely negligent last night, I should say."

"An' me, too."

By this time several more faces appeared at the door, the cowboys having heard something had gone wrong. Yank explained everything, and the surprise and rage of the cowboys were apparent.

"It'll git so we can't lay down ter sleep an' feel safe from that critter!" cried one. "He's er perfec' snake, fer he manages ter crawl in everywhar!"

At this moment, word was brought of the return of Major Navrain.

"Thet's ther man we want ter see, lad!" cried the round-shouldered miner. "He'll do suthin' ter help us, I know!"

The rancher had returned unexpectedly, every one seeming surprised at his appearance. Yank and Loyal found him sitting in the shade, fanning himself. The old miner at once went to the point, telling such things as he believed would be of importance to the old soldier. The major listened with a heavy frown on his face, now and then asking a question, in that manner getting at the facts he had not already learned from some of the cowboys. Finally, he burst forth, angrily:

"It seems as if Satan had been let loose! I feared it—I had a presentiment—and that is why I hastened back so swiftly, having completed my business in an hour after meeting my man, when I had planned on its taking several days. You say Culver is missing, as well as this girl?"

"It may be he and the lads who were with him have fell into trouble. They must be looked up. And that girl shall be rescued if I have to go after her myself clean to the heart of Devil's Mountains!"

"Thet's ther kind o' talk I like ter hear!" nodded Yank, with deep satisfaction. "I reckon we're all right, now you're hyer, major."

The old soldier declared he had not slept for two nights, and his haggard face indicated he told the truth. But for all of his evident need of rest, he said he would be ready to move toward the Devil's Mountains in two hours.

"And I will take a select lot of my boys along," he concluded. "I fancy I can find some of them who will follow me into the uncanny peaks. But I must get a little sleep before we start."

The major retired into the hacienda, and a few minutes later, Manuel Covote appeared. The Spaniard asked if anything had been seen of the two men in whose company he left Kicker's Bar, Shanks and Scraggs. Finding neither Yank nor Loyal knew anything of them, he continued his search.

Within a corridor of the building, he suddenly came face to face with a female, who attempted to conceal her features by quickly turning her head. But Manuel had caught a glimpse, and that was enough. With a cry, he leaped forward, clutching the girl by the shoulder:

"Pepita!"

"Manuel!"

"Mary Mother be praised! I have found you at last, sister mine!"

In another moment the girl was sobbing on his shoulder.

"I have searched for you so long, little one," said Manuel, speaking in Spanish. "I had begun to think I should never find you, but I have you at last."

She made no reply. He attempted to lift her face to look in her eyes, but she hung her head with shame.

"Pepita."

"Yes, brother."

"You do not look me in the face. Why is that? You left me to go with the cursed Americano. He promised to marry you, you said. Did he keep his word, little sister?"

No reply.

A black look crept over Manuel's face.

"You know I swore to have his life, Pepita. I have not forgotten that oath, though I had almost resolved to cast it aside if I found you happy with him—as his wife!"

He paused again, feeling her slender form trembling in his arms. The cloud upon his face grew still blacker.

"You fled with him against my wishes, sister mine. Did the cursed heretic make you his wife?"

Again she failed to reply.

"That is enough!" came harshly from his lips, as he thrust her out at arm's length and held her there. "I have no scorn—no harsh words for you, my sister; but the deceiving Americano shall be called to his duel! My hand shall—"

With a sobbing cry, she flung both her arms around him.

"No! no! no!" came pantingly from her lips. "Manuel, my brother, you must not harm him! He is everything to me! You must not—you must not!"

Rather rudely he broke that grasp, snatching out a glittering knife, as she fell on her knees at his feet, and brandishing it over her head.

"Mercy!" she gasped. "Mercy for him I love!"

"Mercy!" he echoed, bending forward and peering into her pale face with his gleaming eyes—"mercy for the accursed Americano who has ruined your life? Ha! ha! ha! You should know better than to ask it of me, Pepita! Mercy! I will give him such mercy as he has shown you! My oath shall be kept! I will bury this bright blade in his black heart!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIAMOND DION BARS THE WAY.

DOWN to death plunged the black horse on the back of which the helpless giant was bound. With that almost human scream of horror coming from its throat, the magnificent animal plunged down into the denser darkness which lay like a pall in the depth of Skeleton Cut.

The instant that spring was taken the Mazepa rider knew what it meant. It was a horrible thing, this being carried to death blindfolded, yet no cry came from the Goliath's lips, for he knew his enemy was in close pursuit, and he would not give the wretch the pleasure of hearing another sound from him.

The Silver-edged Sport fully expected that fall would end in the instant death of both himself and horse, and the swift rush through the air so drew the breath from his lungs that he was nearly unconscious when the shock came.

And such a shock as it was! In a moment there came a bursting as of a million rockets before his eyes, then—oblivion!

How long he remained in an unconscious state was left for him to discover by what afterward occurred, but his senses finally came slowly back to him, and he understood he was not dead. At first the thought came to him vaguely, as if the mad Mazepa ride and the final plunge had been a dream from which he was slowly awakening; but after a long time, he understood it had actually occurred.

But where was he? How had his life been preserved? Was it still night?

He finally understood the bandage was still over his eyes, and that caused the darkness. He tried to move, but every limb seemed rigidly set, as if in a vise. That effort sent a sensation darting over his body as of ten thousand pricking needles, and for a short time he suffered tortures indescribable.

When this terrible pricking had somewhat passed away, he set his muddled wits to solve the problem, and he was not long about it. It soon came to his understanding he was still bound to the horse that had taken that fearful plunge, but the animal was dead beneath him, a crushed and flattened carcass.

He was not dead, but would it not have been better if that fearful fall had ended the lives of both horse and rider? This question passed through his mind as he realized the full horror of his helpless situation. When day came, if it had not already come, vultures and beasts of prey would scent the carcass of the dead horse. They would flock to the feast! Then he, the living but helpless man, would be torn and devoured with the horse, unable to lift so much as a finger to protect his own life!

The thought was horrible!

Once again he tried to stir his limbs, only to again bring on that pricking sensation; yet he did not desist till he was satisfied all his efforts were useless.

Was he doomed to such a horrible fate?

How long he lay thus after regaining consciousness he could not say, but at length he thought he heard the sound of voices at a distance. He listened closely, and was rewarded by hearing the ring of an iron-shod hoof.

Human beings—horsemen—were advancing toward him! Were they friends? Were they enemies? What mattered it? Even though they were enemies, it were better they found and released him, if that release was only in the way of immediate death. A quick death was preferable to a lingering torture by starvation or being torn by prowling animals and birds of prey.

Lifting his voice, he uttered a ringing shout that awoke scores of echoes in the Cut.

"Help, help! This way! Help!"

Then he listened.

Silence! Had an excited fancy played a trick upon him? Were those voices and that ring of iron hoofs but imaginings of an unsettled brain? The thought seemed enough to drive him to frenzy, but with a great effort he kept himself in check. Once more he shouted:

"Help! Come this way!"

The cry reached the ears of two men who had been passing along the Cut.

They were the actor and poet, Shanks and Scraggs.

Scraggs was mounted on an excellent horse that fortune seemed to have sent them, it being the animal owned by Jock Gilson before his death at the hands of the Indians. When the ruffianly cowboy fell from the saddle, the animal dashed away across the plain, and fortune had sent it straight to the wandering poet and actor. The former had been raised on a farm in the East, and he succeeded in catching the animal after considerable trouble. He immediately decided to ride the horse and lead the mule.

During the entire night the actor and poet sought to return to the hacienda, but they only succeeded in getting further from it, and morning found them making their way through Skeleton Cut. When Seth's cry came to their ears, they immediately drew rein.

"Hearken!" quoth the tragedian, holding up one hand. "What was that strange sound?"

"It seemed like the voice of a human being in distress," answered Scraggs.

"Methinks it might have been the howl of some ferocious beast."

"Nay, nay! 'Twas a human voice!"

"Hast heard some beasts make sounds so human they oft-times deceive the very elect?"

"That was no animal, Brother Shanks."

"Why so certain, Brother Scraggs?"

"I distinguished words—an appeal for help."

"It may be some creature beset by red-men, and if, perchance, we advance to his aid, our own scalp-locks will dangle from the girdles of the copper-skinned denizens of the wilds."

"But can we leave the man in misery without investigating to discover the trouble?"

Shanks's reply was a cough.

"It may be," spoke Scraggs, solemnly—"it may be he has discovered a nugget of gold so large he needs aid in carrying it."

"It may be he has discovered the hidden treasure of the Aztec ruin!"

"Shall we advance?"

"Yes—hark!"

Then they heard Seth's second cry.

"There is no doubt but it is a human voice," asserted Shanks.

"None at all," agreed Scraggs.

"We will go forward with caution."

Having arrived at this decision, they slowly advanced till they came in sight of the helpless giant. Then they halted, in amazement.

"What is this me eyes behold!" exclaimed Shanks, tragically. "A human being it is, but such the plight, I am amazed! Is he disabled, killed or only dead?"

"He seems alive. We have heard his voice, and—ha! see! he moves his head! He is looking this way!"

Once more Seth called to them.

"He is injured," asserted Scraggs. "Is not that crushed mass beneath him the body of a horse?"

"It looks thus."

"It must be they fell from the verge above! Goodness! it is a wonder man is not dead as well as horse! And stay! By Jinks! it is our giant friend of the silver trimming!"

Having made this discovery, they rode forward, discovering as they advanced that Seth was blindfolded and tied to the dead horse. This filled them with wonder they could not express.

"Satan himself must have been at work last night!" cried Shanks, as he dismounted from the mule upon reaching the helpless man.

The poet sprung down from his horse, giving vent to a rhyme as soon as his feet struck the ground.

"What's this I see—a man? Alas!"

How came he in so strange a pass?

And by what chance, while passing near,

Is it we find him lying here?"

Recognizing their voices, Seth called them by name and asked to be released.

"With pleasure will we set you free, noble sir," declared Shanks.

"With delight will we release you, magnificent man," assured Scraggs, thus outdoing his partner.

In another moment their fingers were at work at the rawhide cord, but Seth could not wait for so slow a release.

"See if you can get at my knife," he said.

"If you can, cut the infernal rope in a thousand pieces! Take away this blindfold, for heaven's sake!"

The blindfold was removed and the knife secured. In a few moments the man was free from the dead horse, but when he tried to arise to his feet, he found himself unable to do so, and he fell back on the ground, uttering a bitter cry of fury.

"What is it?" asked Scraggs. "Are you hurt so badly?"

"I am numb in every limb," replied the giant. "I do not think I am hurt at all, though I received a large-sized shake-up. I shall be all right when my blood gets to circulating naturally, then—then, Worth Warwick, look to yourself, you double dastard!"

There was such fury expressed by these words

that both the poet and the tragedian shrunk back in alarm.

"By me faith!" gasped Shanks. "I would not care to be in Worth Warwick's shoes, whoever he is!"

"If half the fury in his eyes
Falls on Sir Warwick's head,
And Warwick then lays down and dies,
The wretch will then be dead."

asserted the poet, finding a little difficulty in filing out the final line with a rhyming word that would make good sense.

When they questioned Seth as to how he came in such a plight, he explained as briefly as possible.

"And wilt thou return to the hacienda?" inquired Shanks.

"Not if I can purchase that horse," came grimly from Seth's lips. "If you will sell me the animal, I will go on into the mountains, for I feel sure I shall find my foe there."

"And may we have the pleasure of accompanying you? We are traveling thither."

For a moment the giant hesitated, then he said:

"If you will sell me the horse, you shall go with me as far as you wish."

"Then the horse is yours till his rightful master claims him," bowed Scraggs, following with an explanation concerning how the animal came into their possession.

"Good!" exclaimed Seth, his eyes gleaming with an ominous fire. "Now I will crowd Worth Warwick to the wall! Without a doubt he thinks me dead; otherwise, he would have investigated the result of the plunge over the precipice. But he shall find me alive—alive to seek satisfaction for every moment of torture he has caused me! I believe my life was spared for that very purpose, for see! my poor horse was crushed to a shapeless mass. His body served as a cushion to break my fall! Ha! ha! I still live, Worth Warwick—I still live!"

In his excitement the giant threw off his recent weakness and sprang to his feet, once more the magnificent Goliath!

In a short time they were ready to move onward, and they turned their faces toward the uncanny mountains, Seth seeming to have forgotten everything else but his thirst for vengeance.

For two hours they rode onward, getting well into the border of the mountains. By that time they began to feel the pangs of hunger.

Fortune favored them, Seth being able to shoot three fat sage-hens, and they paused, built a fire and cooked the food thus provided. They seemed to take no thought of how they should exist after they penetrated into the barren mountains. This was not Culver's usual good judgment, but the events of the night had in a measure unbalanced the giant's brain.

When their hunger had been satisfied, they found a small spring of water and quenched their thirst, after which they were ready to move on again.

As they rode forward, Shanks motioned for his partner to fall back. Seth seemed to take no notice of this.

"Had we better tell him why we are going into the Devil's Mountains?" asked the actor, in a cautious whisper.

Scraggs quickly shook his head.

"We will keep the secret of the buried treasure to ourselves," he said. "If we can find the old Aztec ruin, we are almost certain to discover the buried treasure."

"Unless that man lied."

"He was dying. There was no reason why he should lie."

"That is true. I believe the treasure is amid these mountains fast enough."

"And we do not wish to share it with any one. This man, this giant, has been injured so he is little short of a madman. I can see madness in his eyes. It were not well to tell him anything that will excite him."

"How about the work of the red devils who captured the girl last night?"

"Gracious! I had quite forgotten that for the time. Do you think it best to tell him of that?"

"What do you think?"

"I do not believe it would be a good thing. It will simply arouse him to a greater pitch of excitement, and he may be angry because we did not tell him before."

Both of the men were afraid of the giant, for it was true Seth seemed quite unlike himself, his aspect being anything but one to invite confidence, so it was decided to tell him nothing. Had he been told of Lois's misfortune, he might have altered his plans to a great extent.

As they advanced, the face of the country became more barren and uninviting, and, as had been said of those mountains, the sun seemed to pour its heat down more intensely than on the open plain. All vegetation seemed to wither before that scorching glare, and on every hand was seen a mass of black, barren walls. It was like a land of desolation and death.

Suddenly, as they advanced along a narrow pass that seemed a sort of gateway to the desolate country beyond, a horseman appeared in their path and pointed a rifle straight at the three men, crying sharply:

"Halt!"

The man was dressed fancifully after the Mexican style, and the sunlight flashed from the gold mountings of the weapons. From various parts of his person seemed to dart little sparks of colored fire, something which betrayed the fact that the sunshine fell on many diamonds of the first water.

The man who blocked the passage was Diamond Dion!

CHAPTER XVII.

BOTH BITTERLY DECEIVED.

SILVER-EDGED SETH uttered a low exclamation as his eyes rested on his brother, but his hand made no motion toward a weapon.

"Halt!" repeated the Diamond Sport. "You can go no further in this direction."

"Valois!"

The word came from the giant's lips, and the strange accent caused the man with the rifle to give a start.

"Brother!"

Again Seth spoke, and when last these two men had been face to face he had declared the wearer of the diamonds was no brother of his.

Dion could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears, for he had expected his brother would be hot for his blood since what had passed between them.

"Do you call me that?" he exclaimed, hoarsely, allowing the rifle to fall a little, but still keeping it ready for use. "You who have said I was nothing to you since the record of the past? I cannot believe my ears!"

"Val, I wish to speak with you. Put down that rifle, and I will come forward."

"To kill me! Is that what you would do?"

"I have no desire now, to kill you."

Still the Diamond Sport hesitated. If Seth did not mean to kill him, might he not contemplate some other revenge. The wearer of the silver trimmings seemed to read the doubts of the one who confronted him.

"I have no designs upon you, Val," he hastened to assure. "I am honest in my desire to speak with you, and when you appeared I was thinking of you. If you trust me now, you shall never have cause to regret it. If you had trusted me in the past, how much better it might have been! But I am not here to revile you. Will you grant me the few minutes I ask?"

"I will, if you will promise not to attempt to pass me and go on into the mountains."

"I will not pass without your permission."

"That is enough."

Seth spoke a few words to his companions, bidding them wait till he had completed his interview with the Diamond Sport, then he went forward to meet his brother, the man of Devil's Mountains awaiting his approach with some trepidation.

Reining in close to Valois, Seth sprang from the saddle, saying:

"I feel as if I can talk better on my feet."

The wearer of the diamonds also dismounted.

"Go on," came from his lips. "If you have anything to say, I am ready to listen."

"I have something to say, but I scarcely know how to say it. You remember the words I uttered when we met in Kicker's Bar?"

"Only too well!"

"I meant all I said, and—"

"Is this why you wished to speak with me? Are you going to repeat those words?"

"No; I have something quite different to say."

"Then I will listen."

Still the Silver-edged Sport hesitated, a shadow on his strong face, making it plain he knew not just how to express himself. Of a sudden, he held out his open hand to the other. The man of Devil's Mountains shrunk back, his face suddenly paling, as he gazed at his brother, in amazement.

"Take it, Val!"

"What can you mean?"

"I mean just what you see; I am ready to shake your hand. The scales have been removed from my eyes in a night, and I now know how bitterly we have both been deceived."

"I do not understand you."

"You cannot fail to understand this offer of my hand. Will you take it?"

"When last we met you refused to acknowledge me as a brother."

"Have I not said the scales have fallen from my eyes since then?"

"But—but you know I fled with her."

A look of pain passed over the Goliath's face.

"I know, of course."

"And that makes no difference?"

"Not now, Val. You were deceived."

"I deceived? In what way? I do not understand you, Seth! Are you in your right mind?"

"If I ever was. I mean just what I say, though I dare not explain now. Take my hand, Val!"

Their palms met, and they gazed straight into each other's eyes, two noble-looking men!

For some time they stood silently thus, then Seth dropped his brother's hand, his lips quivering, as he struggled to suppress the intense emotion he felt. In this he was not entirely successful, for a great sob came from his dry throat,

and he buried his face in his hands, standing trembling before the astonished witness of the outbreak.

"Seth!"

The Goliath did not fling his brother's hand aside when it fell on his shoulder; he did not shrink beneath the touch.

"Seth, what has caused this change?"

After a few moments, the Silver-edged Sport lowered his hands to reply:

"The change was caused by learning the truth—the bitter black truth of which I never dreamed till last night. Then the wretch who wrecked my life crouched over me as I lay bound and helpless, and he hissed the whole foul tale into my ears! Then I saw how we have both been deceived, brother."

A puzzled look settled on the face of the listener, and he slowly shook his head, looking pityingly at Seth.

"It was a dream—or else you are becoming deranged, Seth. Your eyes look so strangely; your face is so bagged! Can it be your mind is really unbalanced?"

"My mind is all right, though it would not be strange if it had been unsettled by what I passed through in the later hours of last night. Val, before last night I suffered tortures enough to kill a common man, but with that treacherous devil crouching above me, hissing his cursed tale into my ears, I suffered a hundred-fold more than ever before! Then I learned how I lost the love of a true woman through no fault of mine! But I am saying too much! I must stop!"

He had said enough to thoroughly arouse the curiosity of the man who was listening. With eagerness expressed in voice and face, Dion cried:

"No, no! go on! Explain your words! I cannot understand your meaning!"

Seth shook his head.

"I have said enough—too much! But, know this, brother: since I heard that tale of a dastard's terrible treachery last night, all my hatred for you has vanished—it has gone from my breast. I know you thought me false to my wife—Agnes; I know how you were deceived."

The Diamond Sport drew back, his face growing stern and cold.

"Deceived! Is it this you would tell me? Deceived! Ah! but I saw with my own eyes! No, no! Do not speak to me of that!"

For several moments Seth was silent, looking sadly at his brother. When he spoke, the words came very slowly:

"I am well aware I cannot convince you with my own mouth, yet, as Almighty God is my Judge, I speak the truth! You need not believe me now, but the time shall come when you will believe, for I will make his lying lips confess the truth in your hearing."

"He? Who?"

"The dastard who wrought all this ruin! The wretch who deceived us both in the past! Last night he held me in his power; to-day he believes I am lying dead at the bottom of a ravine. But I live—live to crush his serpent head beneath my heel!"

More than ever did Seth Culver look like a madman at that moment. His hands clinched, his face black, the cords standing out on his neck, his eyes flashing fire, he was truly a picture of fury just then.

"Seth—Seth, you are mad!"

"Then my madness has a purpose—a terrible purpose! Before last night I only lived for my child—my little Lois, God bless her! Now I live for vengeance, as well! Now I live to bring the dastard to the feet of the woman his base lies deceived!"

"Agnes?"

"Yes, Agnes."

Then Diamond Dion's face caught some of that shadow. At first it was but a tiny cloud, but swiftly it grew broader and blacker, till it was like a mighty storm-cloud that shrouds the entire horizon. Drawing himself up till he seemed quite as large as his gigantic brother, he fairly thundered:

"Enough of this! Do you think to deceive me with some shallow scheme? You would seek the woman you betrayed in such a foul manner! You would turn her head with your craftily-devised tales! But listen! As true as you make the attempt—as true as you force your way to her side, I will stretch you dead at her feet!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN DEVIL DON'S DOMAIN.

THE Diamond Sport was in deadly earnest, as his appearance plainly indicated, but Seth did not shrink in the least. Looking his brother calmly, sadly in the face, the Goliath deliberately replied:

"You know not what you are saying, Val. If you but knew the truth—the wretched truth!—you would go down on your knees and beg my pardon for what you have done—you would hate yourself for ever believing the lying tongue of the vengeful devil who so successfully deceived us both."

A smile that was more than half a sneer crept slowly across Diamond Dion's face, and he looked scornfully at the speaker.

"It will not work, Seth. I could almost for—"

give your weakness in being led astray, but if you persist in this attempt to deceive me, I shall be unable to forgive you for that."

Seth Culver lifted his broad right hand and let it fall lightly but firmly on his brother's shoulder, looking him squarely in the eyes, as he spoke:

"Val, I am speaking the solemn truth when I say I have no desire to deceive you. You have already been deceived enough. You would stop me from going forward into these mountains, fearing I might meet Agnes. Brother, Satan himself cannot stop me, for within these mountains I believe is the retreat of the execrable wretch who has caused me so much sorrow?"

"As I live, rather than have you meet her—Agnes—I would stretch you dead before me at this moment! Not that I fear she would care for you again—would leave me to go with you, for she has told me many times how she tore your image from her heart, even though it seemed like taking a part of her life."

"Ah, Merciful God!"

Seth Culver clutched at his breast as if those words had been a keen dagger driven straight into his heart, then he swayed blindly, seeming on the point of falling. In a moment Dion was convinced the agony was genuine, and he sprang forward to catch his brother in his arms, crying brokenly:

"Seth—Seth—my brother! How merciless! Forgive me—forgive!"

The Silver-edged Sport had turned ghastly pale for a moment, and he seemed quite as weak as a woman just then. His eyes rolled and his lips spoke a few mumbling words.

At that moment the younger brother hated himself for the words which had passed his lips a few seconds before.

"It was thoughtless of me, Seth," he said, softly. "You still love her, no matter what your error may have been. I had no right to strike such a blow."

Slowly the big fellow passed an arm around his brother's shoulders; their eyes met.

"Just as when we were boys together, Val!" slowly, softly spoke the older. "That was long, long years ago. Then nothing had come between us—no lie had wrought the grim horror that now holds us apart with its skeleton hands. I visited the old home less than a year ago, Val. I went down to the old village cemetery and placed some flowers on mother's grave. It was so lonely there without you—dear brother! Val," speaking like one in a dream, "the time will come when it will be all right again. Sometimes I have felt like cursing God and taking my own life, but something has held me back from the mad act. Perhaps it was our dear mother—perhaps she is watching over us all the time. Sometime—in the Great Hereafter—the clouds will be scattered, and we will be reunited."

Then he suddenly started and stepped back, passing a hand across his face as though brushing away a cloud. His lips ceased to quiver, his form became firm and upright—he was the stern, unrelenting avenger again.

"I am going on into these mountains, Valois. I ask you not to attempt to stop me."

"Whom do you seek here?"

"The devil who wrought the ruin. I shall know him when I find him."

"You cannot mean Devil Don?"

"I know not what he is called, but we shall meet."

"Who are those men with you?"

"Two harmless cranks who are seeking for gold in the Devil's Mountains."

"They had better turn back."

"I fancy it would take considerable to cause them to retreat."

"But where are your pack-animals? where is your food?"

"We have no pack-animals; we will find our food in the mountains."

"You are crazy! These mountains are barren and desolate. You will perish."

"We had no time to return for food."

"Water you may find, but game is seldom seen in this part of the range. Take my advice, and go back for provisions."

Seth sternly shook his head, the fiery light creeping into his eyes once more.

"I have no time to waste."

The Diamond Sport saw how useless it was to argue with the man while he was in that state of mind, so he said:

"Seth, I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"I want you to promise not to try to find Agnes."

Only for a moment did the Goliath hesitate, then he said:

"I will promise not to seek for her till you give me permission to see her. If fortune should throw us together, I will not be responsible."

"I can ask no more. Here, take this rifle, for you may need it, it being barely possible you will see some game you can shoot with it. There would be little chance of success with your revolvers."

Seth would have protested, but the other silenced him and forced the rifle upon him. Then

their hands met once more, and, with a word of parting, the Diamond Sport swung into the saddle and rode away.

The giant stood silently beside his horse, watching the figure of his brother till it vanished in the distance. He was in a reverie, from which he was aroused by the voice of J. W. B. Shanks, the actor and poet having joined him unbidden.

In a few moments they were moving forward into the barren mountains once more.

Before mid-day they were forced to halt in the sheltering shade of a canyon wall, having very fortunately found a small spring of water. From the spring they first quenched their thirst then allowed the horses to drink. A fringe of short grass around the spring gave the animals a very meager feed, but it was much better than nothing.

There, in the shade of the wall, the three men lay for as many hours, gasping for breath and perspiring from every pore. Once in a while a tiny breath of air would sweep along the gorge, but it seemed hot enough to have come from the open door of a distant furnace. Both actor and poet expressed their belief that there might be some truth in the saying that there was an opening to the infernal regions somewhere amid the mountains.

At length, in desperation, they started on, hoping to find a spot where the heat was less suffocating.

Near night they came to a scantily-timbered section, and there by rare good fortune, Seth espied a stray antelope and succeeded in bringing the animal down with the rifle. Thus their supper was provided for, and the discovery of grass and water filled them with satisfaction.

They little dreamed of the glittering eyes that watched their little camp-fire as night came on and darkness shrouded the uncanny mountains.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAJOR NAVRAIN'S MISFORTUNE.

BEFORE he laid down to obtain a little sleep, Major Navrain gave a few orders to one of his men; and when he awoke, he found a large party, including Yank, Loyal and Manuel Covote, ready to follow his lead to the mountains.

Major Nepal looked around at the men in evident surprise.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Some of you fellows have declared nothing would induce you to enter the Devil's Mountains. You must know I am going straight into those mountains, and there is apt to be some pretty lively fighting before we return."

"We don't keer er dern fer ther fightin', boss, as you knows," replied one of the men. "We kin live on fightin'. It's ther ole Devil him own self as we hev been skeered of, but sence las' night ther boys hev 'lowed it's 'bout time his tail wuz twisted. Ther's w'y we're hyer. Ef you wanted ter leave ther ranch 'thout any protection, ev'ry derned galoot of ther hull gang w'd foller whar you led."

The major straightened up as if with soldierly pride, nodding with intense satisfaction.

"That is the kind of talk that does my ears good!" he cried. "I shall be proud to lead such a party, and Devil Don will have his hands full when we find him. That fellow is no more than human, and a bullet in the right place will finish him, though I want him taken alive if possible. Remember that—do not shoot the fiend unless you have to. A rope is what he deserves, and a rope he shall have, as sure as my name is Nepal Navrain!"

These words filled the cowboys with enthusiasm, and a cheer for the major was the result.

Then the old war-horse investigated to see if all necessary preparations had been made and the party was properly provisioned for a trip of several days. He found things satisfactory, and curtly expressed his approval.

But, ere they left the ranch, a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Have Gila Jack and the others come in?" he asked. "Where is Silver-edged Sport?"

But neither Seth Culver nor the companions with whom he was last seen had appeared.

Major Nepal shook his head soberly as he heard that, muttering something only understood by himself.

"I 'low you reckon somep'n's happened ter Silver Trimmis?" observed Yuma Yank.

"It looks that way," confessed the major. "If nothing has happened to him or my men who are missing, what keeps them away?"

"Thet's jest w'at I can't understand," acknowledged the round-shouldered miner. "Major, did it ever strike you thet Gila Jack's p'ison?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, did it ever 'cur ter you thet he's crooked—er derned sneak?"

"I don't know as it ever did," answered the old soldier, slowly.

"Waal, I'll bet my shirt he is!" cried Yank, firmly. "An' thet's w'at's ther matter with Hannah!"

"You think—just what?"

"I think he is at the bottom o' this yar failure o' Pard Silver-edge ter turn up."

"He has always done his work well," muttered the major, as if speaking more to himself than to Yank. "I never exactly liked his looks,

but I thought that might be my fault. He has a bad eye—"

"Thar—now you hev jest hit it right, thar!" Yank broke in. "Ef he hain't got ther eye o' er snake, then I'm er derned ole fool!"

The major started and looked at Rollins through his glasses, staring steadily at the old fellow for several seconds; then he nodded sharply several times and wheeled away, without a word.

In a few moments the cavalcade was ready to start, and Major Nepal gave the word. They rode out from the ranch, with the men cheering and the dogs barking behind them.

When they were fairly on their way, the major joined Yank and Loyal, who were conversing earnestly.

"Rollins," said the old soldier, having learned Yank's name, "I believe you were right about Gila Jack. Your words set me to thinking, and I have recalled several instances that look bad for the fellow. But, if he were crooked, what could he have against the giant?"

"It might not be w'at he hed, major; but he might be in ther employ o' some other critter as hed er hefty grudge."

"Who?"

"Waal, I'll 'low thet's sayin', but thar are them as hev, an' I dunno but Devil Don's one o' 'em."

"That may be true," said the ex-officer, soberly. "If this devil was at the bottom of the kidnapping of the girl—and he surely was—why shouldn't he have a score against Culver? I believe you have struck the point, old man."

"How about Diamond Dion?" ventured Loyal.

"I wuz jest going ter mention him," spoke the major. "Those fellows are not friends by a long chalk, and Dion never fancies an intrusion into the Devil's Mountains."

"Did you ever think it might be Diamond Dion an' Devil Don are ther same critter?"

The major started.

"Yes, I have thought so," he confessed, after quite a pause; "but at the present time, I scarcely believe it possible."

"W'y not?"

The answer to this question did not come readily, but the veteran finally replied:

"I am not sure I can give you my exact reasons, but one thing must be plain to you, if you have ever had the fortune to see this Demon of Devil's Mountains: Dion is a most horrible-looking creature, from whose head an eye has been removed; Dion is a handsome man with two good eyes. I do not mention the Devil's tushes for art might supply them; but art cannot supply a perfect eye. I only wish it could! I would have a pair put into my head that would enable me to see without the aid of glasses."

"Hain't it possible one o' Dion's eyes is glass, major?"

The old soldier shook his head.

"Scarcely possible."

"Waal, then, hain't it possible thet as Devil Don he kin make up so's ter make it seem one eye's gone?"

"I am not so sure about that," was the hesitating reply. "But I cannot understand how it could be done. I know some of my men—indeed, the greater part, I think—believe Devil Don and Diamond Dion one and the same. They argue Dion could not exist as he does if he were not a rustler and an outlaw; but that does not convince me. Dion is a sport, and he has made many fine winnings at cards. The money thus obtained probably purchased the diamonds he wears and was enough for him to live on."

"But why should he choose such a place to live as the Devil's Mountains?" ventured Loyal.

"There you have me with a question unanswerable," confessed Navrain. "He is a mystery—an enigma beyond solving."

"An' I suppose you have heerd o' the purty woman as has bin seen in them mountains?" questioned Yank.

"I have heard of her; but I am inclined to doubt her existence. She is a production of some romantically-inclined fellow's fancy, I believe."

It was plain the major was skeptical concerning the tales in circulation about the Diamond Sport and the fair unknown.

After a time their conversation turned upon Silver-edged Seth again, and the ex-officer declared his intention of making a search for the Sport and the missing cowboys.

"W'at d'yer think o' ther major, lad!" questioned Yank, when the old soldier had turned away to take the lead of the party.

"I hardly know as I can express an opinion," was the reply, spoken for Yank's ears alone.

"It was singular, but the more he argues against Diamond Dion and Devil Don being one and the same, the more I began to believe they might possibly be. The major seemed positive, but for all that, he may be greatly mistaken. If the Diamond Sport is not Devil Don, or in some way connected with the outlaws, why does he live amid yonder mountains, and how does he continue to live there unmolested?"

"Two hard questions ter answer, lad. Reckon I'll hev ter guv 'em up fer ther time. One thing's sart'in: Pard Silver-edge an' Dion hain't no frien's."

Before the party entered the more prominent foot-hills, the major divided them into two sections, appointing a place of meeting ere they entered the mountains, and giving instructions for the party that got there first to await the coming of the other. Then he carefully instructed the leader of one party on the course to pursue, taking charge of the other party himself.

"By this we may strike the missing ones," he explained. "Anyway, the chance of their passing us by accident will be small."

It happened Loyal and Yank were with the party that was instructed to go through Skeleton Cut. The major led the other band. Little did our friends dream of the discovery they would make in the bottom of the gorge.

The shadows of Skeleton Cut were grateful, after they had been beneath the full force of the blazing sun so long, and both men and horses were glad of the relief.

As they went forward, Yank and Loyal wondered what had become of the actor and poet, for whom Manuel Covote had searched in vain.

"It must be they stole from the ranch in the night and made for the mountains," said Loyal.

"Pro'ly goin' ter make sure they git that treasure all ter their own selves," laughed Yank.

"It must be they are after the same treasure for which I have come so many miles. But I have a paper to guide me, and if we only find the old Aztec ruin, we shall be pretty sure of recovering the treasure."

"Less some derved critter's bin thar afore us, lad. You must count on that."

"I do. But it is not the treasure I care for now."

"No, I reckon not—leastwise, not ther one ye 'riginally started fer. Ther treasure you're arter's consider'ble diff'runt. I've hit it plumb center, lad!"

"You have, Yank," Loyal frankly confessed. "But I may never see her again! If that Demon harms her, he shall suffer for it! I will avenge her, if I have to give my whole life to it!"

"Got 'em!" grinned Yank—"got 'em bad! All right, boy; I'll help ye ther best I know how, an' yer Uncle Yank hain't any help ter be despised."

"Be sure I appreciate your kindness, Yank."

"Don't mention it, pard!"

Finally their attention was attracted by several buzzards in the air ahead.

"Thar's carr'on thar," asserted Yank. "It lays right in our path."

In a short time they came to the spot where the Silver-edged Sport and his horse had struck after that fearful plunge. From a mass of gleaming bones rose a flock of well-gorged vultures.

"A hoss," declared one of the cowboys. "Reckon it didn't hev er rider, fer thar hain't no saddle hyer ner no other bones."

There was apparently nothing by which to tell who had owned the horse in life, but something seemed to tell Yuma Yank it was that of the Silver-edged Sport.

"Mebbe thar's somep'n' by which we kin tell ther truth," he muttered, continuing the search. And then he came upon something—a knife. It was Seth's weapon, by the aid of which his rescuers had released him.

"Hyer's letters!" exclaimed the old fellow. "S. C." Ef them don't stan' fer Seth Culver, I'm er fool!"

The old fellow felt convinced they had found the giant's knife and the skeleton of his horse, but it was impossible to imagine what had happened to the Sport.

In a little while the party moved on again, a cloud of ill-omen seeming to have settled over their heads.

They finally left the cut and proceeded toward the place appointed for joining their comrades. Some time before this point was reached they heard the distant sound of firearms.

"By Moses!" shouted the leader of the cowboys, excitedly. "Ther boys are in trouble! Guv yer critters ther spurs, pards, an' we'll take er han'! Come on!"

The horses were not spared, but some time before the point from which the firing had seemed to come was reached, they saw a man riding madly to meet them, waving his hat around his head. As he came nearer, his shouts were plainly heard.

"It's Dick Snow!" cried several.

"An' he's bin sent hot-foot fer us!" added the leader.

In a short time Snow came up.

"Come on, pards!" he shouted. "Thar's ther very ole devil fer pay! Devil Don pounced down on us an' kerried off ther major! Ther boys made er fight, an' some of 'em stopped lead, but ther ole Devil hed too many men fer us, an' he got off with ther boss. Rest of ther lads are cooped abind some rocks!"

CHAPTER XXX.

DIAMOND DION AT BAY.

It was startling intelligence the cowboy had brought them, but there was no time for questions. Immediately they followed him back toward the point where the others were awaiting their coming. When within hearing, their yells

were answered by glad shouts from the little band who had been led by the major.

When the two parties joined, those who had reached the spot at which they were to meet first declared the outlaws had beat a precipitate retreat on hearing the cries of the approaching cowboys. No time was to be lost, and so the cattlemen followed immediately.

No one had been killed in the encounter, but Yank saw several were wearing bandages which proclaimed they had been wounded.

Straight through a narrow pass that led into the mountains dashed the cowboys.

"Them critters with ther boss is some-whar ahead," declared one. "Ef ther boss hedn't bin ridin' ahead of us so fur, they never c'd 'a' worked ther trick. Arter ther ole Devil hed tapped ther major on ther head, he used him as er shield frum our bullets. But fer thet, Devil Don w'd bin riddled."

The end of the pass was reached without seeing anything of the rustlers, and then began some more difficult work, for the kidnappers must be trailed. This necessitated a closer examination of the ground, and for that reason, the rapidity of their pursuit was retarded.

"I'm erfeared ther critters'll git plumb off," declared Yuma Yank.

"So am I, pard," confessed one of the cowboys, who appeared greatly excited at the delay.

"But ef they do, we'll hunt 'em down. They've cooked their goose by tacklin' ther major. Devil Don made er big fool of him own self thet time."

The others seemed scarcely less eager, every man seeming to have forgotten his fear for the Demon of the Mountains.

"Ef ther critter don't kill ther gal, we're party sure ter git her back now," said Yank to Loyal. "These yar cow-punchers are terrors w'en they're 'roused, an' this gang's party mighty well 'roused, you bet!"

"Still the pursuit is so slow!" exclaimed the young man, impatiently.

"Fast as it kin be, under the circumstances. We'll git thar, Eli, don't ye fret!"

"Thet's right, ole man," nodded a cowboy who had overheard the miner's declaration. "We're boun' ter git thar!"

The heat of midday was blazing upon them when the one who had been doing the trailing asserted that he had lost the trail. The men looked at each other in dismay. They were nearly suffocated by the intense heat, and the trailer's assertion seemed to utterly rob them of spirit.

"Tain't no use ter go on 'thout a trail ter fol-ler," muttered one—only to be instantly turned on by his angry comrades.

"You kin go back, Jeff Kerns, ef ye want ter!" cried one. "As fer me, I'm goin' forrard tell Devil Don is foun' an' ther boss is rescued!"

"Me too!" shouted nearly all the others, in chorus.

But they decided to halt while a search was made for the lost trail, and they improved the time thus spent by eating something and drinking some of the warm water the canteens contained.

The man who was looking for the trail finally sent a comrade to announce he had struck something that appeared to look like it, and in a short time the men were ready to move, having moistened the horses' mouths with wet sponges, that being all they could do for the poor animals just then.

All that scorching afternoon they pushed forward, only pausing now and then to rest a few moments in the shade of a barren wall. They entered the very wildest and most dismal portion of the mountains, finally passing through a fissure so narrow they could only ride forward in single file.

From this they came out into a fertile, well-wooded pocket, that seemed entirely shut in from the rest of the world by the rocky walls which arose on every side.

A small cascade of water came tumbling down the rocks at one side, ran across the pocket, and disappeared beneath the opposite wall. The land on every side was fertile and under cultivation. It seemed as if they had struck a little Eden, after the barren land through which they had been passing.

Near the waterfall stood a neat little cabin, the entire front of which was covered by a mass of vines bearing beautiful flowers. It made a pretty, home-like picture.

"Great Scott!" gasped Yuma Yank. "Whar are we? Hev we wandered inter er leetle corner o' Heaven? It looks thet way, b'gash!"

"It is a truly delightful scene," agreed Loyal, filling his lungs with the air made fragrant by the scent of flowers. "I wonder who it can be that lives here?"

"I kin tell ye!" exclaimed one of the cowboys, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Then who is it?"

"Diamond Dion, ur I'm er Maverick!"

It was true; they had penetrated to the retreat of the strange Sport of Devil's Mountains! Even while they were staring in amazement at the cabin, a woman appeared at the door. She uttered a cry of amazement and alarm at sight of them, and suddenly shrunk back. But the men had obtained a fair look at her face, and

they saw she was handsome, despite the fact she was no longer young.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the round-shouldered miner.

"'Twas the mysterious woman of the mountains!" ejaculated a cowboy.

"Sure as shootin'!" agreed another.

"Then this is her home, not Diamond Dion's."

"Mebbe it is ther home of both!"

This was a new thought to many of the men, but they at once saw it was possible. They were destined to quickly have their doubts settled, for in the open doorway of the cabin appeared a man in the place vacated a moment before by the woman.

It was the Diamond Sport!

Dion only paused to look searchingly at the band of men a few moments, then he boldly advanced, his hands on the butts of his handsomely-mounted revolvers. There was a stern look on his dark face, showing he was greatly displeased at this intrusion upon his secluded home.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he sharply demanded, confronting the band of trailers.

There was no immediate reply.

"Speak up, like men!" commanded the Sport.

"Why have you come here to my quiet home? What is it you seek?"

"Mebbe it is you, pard," ventured one.

Dion turned his piercing eyes on the speaker, causing the man to quail a bit.

"Is it I?" he demanded, a suppressed fire in his voice. "If it is, what do you want of me?"

"We are lookin' fer Devil Don," declared a second.

"Well, what has that to do with me?"

"Thar's some as says it hes er good deal, Sport."

"There are some whose foul tongues are forever devising lies about others!"

"But we reckons they wuzn't so very fur out of ther way this time."

"Which is the same as saying I am Devil Don?"

"Mebbe so."

"And you have come here to take me?" Out flashed the polished weapons to be leveled straight at the cowboys. "Well, here I am as large as life! If you want me, take me! I defy your whole crowd to do that little job!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SPORT MEANS BUSINESS.

It was the act of a man recklessly brave, one who seemed to set little store on his own life. It seemed utterly ridiculous for one man to defy that sturdy band of cowboys, every one of whom was armed to the teeth.

But Diamond Dion was not an ordinary man, as his appearance plainly indicated, and he seemed a person utterly devoid of fear. There was that in his face and voice which plainly declared he meant business when he flung his defiance in the faces of the cattlemen.

If the Diamond Sport ever looked handsome in his life, it was at that moment. His face stern, his eyes flashing, his poise that of a god, he was a man to be admired, and the murmur which passed from lip to lip among the cowboys, showed his appearance was not lost on them.

For several moments after that ringing defiance, no man spoke an intelligible word. The murmur that passed round fell to silence, and the silence became almost oppressive. Yuma Yank finally broke out with:

"Holy cats! but thet's ther stuff thet tickles this ole coot's fancy. It's clean grit frum ther word Go! W'en er man squares him own self in thet thar way, it means come straddle my neck ef ye kin. An' it's boun' ter be er howlin' ole job fer them as tries, b'gash!"

"But it is a foolish thing for one man to set himself up against a party like this. A man that will do so is dead sure to go to Glory by the Fast Express."

One of the better educated cowboys made this declaration, dropping the vernacular for the time.

"I hain't so mighty sure 'bout thet," asserted Yank. "I saw Joaquin, the Greaser Outlaw, stan' off twenty men oncet an' git clean off 'thout so much ez er scratch."

"But we don't 'low no outlaw ter work thet on us," declared another of the cowboys.

"Not by er derved sight!"

"He's er fool ter try it!"

"We don't keer fer him ef he is Devil Don!"

"An' thet's w'at he is!"

"You bet yer boots!"

Something like a scornful smile passed over the Sport's face as he heard these cries.

"There is not one man among you all who believes I am Devil Don," he declared.

"Wal, thar jest is!"

"Who is it?"

The Sport's revolver seemed searching for the man who should be rash enough to declare his individual belief that such was the fact, and every one felt sure he would shoot the instant such an assertion was made. This sealed all lips for the time, but the men looked their accusations.

A laugh, soft and even, came from the defiant man's lips—a laugh that did not seem forced.

"So you are in no hurry about expressing your belief that I am the Mountain Demon? Well, I scarcely thought you would be. When you come to think it all over, I fancy you will see you have made a big mistake; in which case, you will certainly beg my pardon."

But that was carrying it a trifle too far, as the looks of the cattlemen plainly showed.

"Not by er derved sight!" growled one.

"Why, sir!" came in evident surprise from Dion's lips; "you do not mean to say you would not ask my pardon if you had made a false charge of that kind against me, do you?"

"Hain't made no false charge!"

"Then you mean to say it is true?"

"I 'lows that's w'at all of us mean."

"That's so!" growled a chorus of voices.

"No, not all!" exclaimed Yuma Yank. "I reckon me an' my pard don't say so. We hain't got no proof as how ye are ther ole Devil, so we don't make no charge."

"Many thanks," bowed Dion, flashing a look at the veteran and Loyal. "You shall be remembered if trouble follows. All I ask is that you keep out of the tangle, that I may not drop you by accident."

"Then you mean ter fight?" asked a cowboy.

"If I am crowded, you bet!"

"You must be er derved fool!"

"Perhaps you think so now; but it is possible you will change your mind by and by."

"Why not guv up quietly?"

"In which case, I should certainly be a 'derved fool.'"

"We'll guv ye a fair show."

The Diamond Sport laughed.

"I know all about the show I should get," he said. "I have seen too many cases of cowboy justice to allow myself caught by such a promise. A fair show with your class means a quick swing from the limb of a tree."

These plain words were not pleasing to the cattlemen, by any means, and black looks on their faces looked blacker still.

"Thar hain't but way one fer ye, anyhow," asserted one.

"And that is?"

"Ter take yer med'cine like er man."

"Which means be hanged like a dog. No, thank you. I am not longing for any of that medicine at present, and what is more, this whole crowd are not enough to givive it to me! I do not care to boast, but it is possible you have heard of Diamond Dion before."

"An' we have heard of Devil Don, too."

"Well, in case I am Devil Don—"

"Heur ther!" yelled a voice. "He confesses!"

The speaker was well in the rear, but he crouched down as he saw Dion's flashing eyes turned in his direction.

"That man is a liar by the clock!" asserted the Mysterious Sport of the Mountains. "I would like the privilege of meeting him face to face on equal footing. I would make him swallow his words in less than a minute."

"An' I'll bet that's kirekt!" nodded Yank Rollins.

Dion continued:

"I was about to say, in case I am Devil Don, you know the kind of a man you have to deal with. In that case, you certainly would have a lively time in downing me."

"An' he tries to skeer us thet way!"

"Thet looks bad—fer him!"

"Sure!"

"W'at's ther use ter parley with ther critter?"

"We kin floor him in no time!"

It seemed that the cowboys would spring for Dion in another moment, but once more his voice rung out clear and commanding:

"Hold! I will shoot the man who tries to draw or makes a move to advance!"

That he meant it no one doubted.

"I am defending something more than my own life," asserted the defiant man. "My home is here. To this hour it has been sacred from intrusion. No man has ventured here to trouble me. Now, you have come, but many of you have come to death as surely as you lift your hands against me!"

"Pure grit, lad!" muttered the round-shouldered miner to Loyal.

"He is certainly a brave man," was the reply. "I can not help admiring him."

"I hev thought he wuz ther old Demon," confessed Yank; "but derved ef I hain't changed my mine all ter oncet!"

"I scarcely think it possible he is that creature."

"I don't reckon we want any hand in this yar row?"

"Not unless we take a hand on his side."

Yank shook his head.

"Thet won't do, lad. We mus' keep on ther right side o' ther cow-punchers ef we wants ter be successful in this yar tower in these mountains."

"But if they were about to kill this man—"

"Time enough ter act then, pard. Till thet time, we must lay out."

Meantime, the cowboys had been exchanging a few words in low tones. The most of them seemed in favor of forcing diamond Dion to surrender, but there were some who thought such a measure unnecessary.

"But ef he is ther Demon," said one, "he has

Major Navrain in his claws. We kin squeeze ther truth out of him."

Yank and Loyal plainly heard these words.

The Sport improved the opportunity to make sure his weapons were in perfect working order, a movement which plainly showed he really intended to fight rather than give in.

"Come now, Sport," said one, "you oughter see thar hain't no earthly use in standin' out erg'in' all of us. Hev er leetle common sense about it, an' guv yerself up."

"Not to-day. I do not care to repeat my words, and it is useless for you to continue demanding my surrender. All this talk means only wasted breath. This is my home, and I shall defend it."

"Ef you shoots one of us you'll shorely hang."

"Even though I shoot in self-defense! Then hang it is! You have no authority to arrest me, and I am simply protecting myself against a lawless band, a thing I have a right to do by the laws of man and nature. I have a shot for every man of you, for my sash holds an extra pair of weapons. When I pull trigger I always mean business. Wade in and make yourselves famous! Now is the chance to win glory—and the grave!"

Still they hesitated. It was no simple thing to capture one defiant man who was fully armed with the weapons he knew how to handle so well. They wished to take Dion alive; but how were they going to do so without a fearful sacrifice of life? That was the question that troubled them just then.

"We've got ter do it, pards," spoke one, in a low tone. "If we move all together, it will not be hard."

The Mysterious Sport's keen ears caught the words.

"If you move all at once, somebody must give the word," he asserted. "I will make it my especial care to drop the man who does so. If any of you are hankering for a lead pill, why, just take the lead in this little matter."

Yuma Yank suppressed a chuckle. The old fellow was actually enjoying the discomfiture of the cattlemen.

But the cowboys were not to be forever bluffed.

"Now, pards, jump him!" yelled one in the taking his chance of escaping the threatened shot.

The words were warm on his lips when the revolver in Diamond Dion's right hand spoke!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WORK OF FIRE-WATER AND FIRE.

A HOWL of pain came from the cowboy's lips as he felt the Diamond Sport's bullet tear through his left ear, for the man at bay had not fired to kill.

The ball was fairly started.

Not an instant did the Sport hesitate, but he began working his weapons with marvelous rapidity, sending down men and horses in a struggling, yelling mass. His shots were returned by some of the cattlemen, but either they were too excited to do accurate work, or else Dion bore a charmed life, for he was untouched.

By good fortune Yuma Yank and Loyal Kingdon were a little at one side when the trouble began, and they escaped going down in that struggling mass.

Having completed the discomfiture of the cowboys, the Sport beat a hasty retreat to the cabin, closing the door before the men could recover from their confusion.

As may be imagined, the cowboys were furious. It did not take long to discover not one of them had been killed outright, though several were quite badly wounded, and some of the horses had been slain.

"It is impossible to picture the rage of the cowboys."

"He must be Devil Don!" cried one. "I fired straight at ther critter, but he never flinched!"

"So did I!" asserted another.

"Looker ther work he's done!"

"I've got er broken arm!"

"My boss is dead."

"Mine too!"

"Curse him! He shall pay for this!"

They did not stop to consider they had brought it on themselves. Dion's hand was in the work, that was enough. Some were for immediately charging on the cabin.

"Let's drag him outer thar! We'll hang ther varmint ter one of these yar' trees!"

"Yes, come on! Foller me!"

But a small window of the cabin was flung open, and the Sport's voice cried, warningly:

"Stay where you are, if you are not anxious for more of the same sort! Next time I may shoot to kill, and I now have the protection of these walls. Have a little judgment, if you care to live."

"Come out hyer!" howled one of the cowboys.

"Dern ye fer er skunk! Come out hyer!"

"Not to-day; some other day; good-day."

"Then we'll pull ye out!"

"I can make sieves of you all before you can do it!"

"We'll hev ye now, ef it takes er wheel!"

A defiant laugh was the reply.

Some of the hot-heads were still in favor of charging on the cabin, but the more discreet

argued again-t it. It was necessary that those who were wounded should have immediate attention. In looking after them, Yuma Yank proved his usefulness and skill, having a handy assistant in Loyal.

The men discussed the situation and heaped imprecations on Diamond Dion's head; still Yank noticed there were some among them who had nothing to say.

"They hain't all fer jumpin' ther Sport, lad," muttered the old fellow, finding an occasion to speak to Loyal without being overheard by ears for which his words were not intended. "Some o' em act ternal queer! I dunno jest w'at ter make o' ther gang."

The young Denverite had noticed the cowboys did not all seem enthusiastic about forcing the attack on the now fortified man who had so effectively proved his utter recklessness.

By the time all the wounded were attended to it was quite dark, night having come on.

"It hain't goin' ter be no hard job ter dig thet critter out o' thar under kiver of darkness," said one.

Some of the cattlemen had produced flasks of liquor, and the fire-water was circulating freely from hand to hand.

"Do in' it ter git braced up," said Yank to Loyal. "Thar's goin' ter be hot times, boy—you heur me! They mean ter snake ther feller thet w'ars ther sparklers out o' thet thar cabin!"

"It must be they have forgotten the woman."

"Mebbe so; mebbe not. They're riled enough ter go fer ther place, female ur no female."

"Cowboys are usually chivalrous."

"I know, but sarcumstances alter cases, pard. They're most mightily mad, an' ther stuff they're drinkin' only makes them madder."

"Can we do nothing to aid the Sport?"

"Hes it gone so fur with ye, lad? You don't mean you'd side with him?"

"He has a woman to protect."

"An' you are redy ter stan by the wimmen. Waal, thet shows ye are er man cleam through. I reckoned ye wuz er boy ter tie to, an' now I see I wuzn't mistooked. You're ther pure white artikil all the way through!"

"Thank you, old man. But you have not answered my question."

"I don't reckon we needs ter help him; he'll take keer o' him own self. All we've got ter do's keep back outer ther fuss."

"But these fellows will be able to raze his cabin to the ground under cover of darkness."

"Ef so, we may hev er chance ter chip in w'en he's in a tight corner."

"Will you do so?"

"Ef it seems fer ther best, pard."

Gradually the effect of the liquor they were drinking became evident on the cowboys. They grew more and more boisterous with each passing minute, and many and fierce were the threats expressed against Diamond Dion. Those who had been wounded in the first scrimmage were eager for satisfaction, and it certainly seemed as if short work would be made of the Sport if he fell into the hands of the cowboys.

"Thar hain't no doubt erbout it!" cried one; "he's ther critter known as Devil Don."

"Ef so," put in Yank Rollins, "whar are his men? Devil Don allus has plenty o' critters at his back."

"You seem ter be sidin' with ther cuss!" sneered the fellow, avoiding answering the miner's question. "Mebbe you like his style of bluff?"

"Now, don't go aff at hafe-cock!" grunted the veteran. "Jest keep yer clothes on, pard. I only axed ye er civil question. W'y don't ye answer it?"

But, instead of answering, the man uttered a growl and walked away. A few moments later Yank heard him earnestly urging some of his comrades to follow him in a charge on the cabin.

"Ef they try it, they'll git er warmin'," asserted the old fellow.

The liquor soon got in its bad work, and the men who had indulged the heaviest were fierce for the attack. They held a consultation, and decided to batter down the door. To do this, it was necessary to find a stick of timber suitable for a battering-ram.

After a short search, the timber was found.

Preparations were made for the charge. Some of the men were to use the timber, and as soon as the door fell, others were to rush in at the breach.

Perfect silence was enjoined when the party was ready to move forward, the leader saying it was important to get as near the cabin as possible before their intention was discovered.

The darkness served as an effective cover for their moves, and soon they advanced quietly toward the cabin, carrying the log, ready for use.

They were still some little distance from the hut when Diamond Dion's voice challenged them:

"Halt there!"

The advance was quickened instead of checked by the reply.

"Halt or die!"

Accompanying the second cry a light was

flashed out from a loop-hole and turned full on them.

"Down with ther door!"

At that cry, the men went forward at a run.

Out from the cabin wall leaped spouts of flame, then came the reports of rapidly-worked revolvers. The cowboys were revealed by the light that had been turned upon them, and the bullets of the unseen defenders sent more than one of them to the ground.

Just as the heavy log touched the door it was dropped, and the attacking party fled in dismay, leaving two of their number behind them, each with a bullet in his leg. Again had Dion driven off the besiegers without taking a single life!

As soon as the cowboys fled, the glare of light which had revealed them was shut off, and the wounded ones crawled slowly away from the cabin.

"It didn't work, did it, lad?" softly laughed Yuma Yank. "Ther sport's good ter take keer o' his own self—yes, he am!"

"It certainly looks that way," agreed Loyal.

"Ef them critters wuzn't hafe drunk, they'd hev more hoss sense; but ther fire-water hes filled their heads with madness. They won't let up tell Dion kills three ur four o' 'em."

And in truth, the cowboys seemed more angry than before. They gathered and excitedly discussed the affair, some of them fairly raving with fury.

"We'll hev ther critter out of thar now anyhow!" howled one. "He hes got ter swing fer w'at he hes did!"

"Right you are, pard!" agreed a mate. "An' I know jest w'at 'll fetch him out er whoopin'."

Then they drew aside and consulted in low tones, seeming to come to an agreement, for both laughed hoarsely. Then they clasped hands, wheeled and vanished in the darkness.

Yank had not witnessed this, but when Loyal told him of it, the old miner shook his head soberly.

"Wish I hed seen 'em," he muttered. "I'd follered an' foun' w'at ther game wuz. They're up ter deviltry o' some kind, pard."

"I thought so, myself."

"Ef we keep our eyes peeled, we'll diskiver w'at it is."

Again the wounded were cared for, the two who had been shot in their legs having crept slowly back to join their friends. More than half-an-hour passed, and still another attack was not made on the cabin. Yank grew nervous.

"Ther critters are up ter—Hello! w'at's that?"

A sudden light arose beside the cabin, and in moment it was seen a brush-pile placed against the building had been fired.

"Ther devils!" gritted Yank. "They mean ter roast ther sport out! It hain't ther right thing ter do!"

"Can't we put out the fire, Yank?" asked Loyal.

"Nary put! Ther only thing we kin do is help ther sport ef we hev er good chance; but we may not hev thet. Ef we show ourselves ter putt out ther fire, ther sport might take er notion ter pump it inter us; an' ef he don't, ther cowboys may."

The half-intoxicated cattlemen danced and yelled as they saw the flames rising beside the cabin.

"Now ther critter 'll hev ter come out!" they yelled.

Soon the light of the fire had arisen enough to reveal some of the dancing figures, and a shot from the cabin knocked the hat from one man's head. This caused the cowboys to retreat further into the gloom, but they held themselves ready for work the moment Dion appeared.

"He'll hev ter come out putty soon."

"Ef he don't, ther cabin 'll go, shore!"

"His goose 'll be cooked."

"Ther fire's gittin' er hefty holt."

The flames were indeed getting a dangerous start, yet the cabin door remained closed and no one appeared to attempt to extinguish them.

"Come out, you fool!" yelled one of the cattlemen—"come out, or roast!"

The answer was a shout of defiance from an open loop-hole in the cabin wall.

Higher and higher rose the flame till one side of the cabin was all ablaze. In a few moments more, escape would be impossible for those within.

"Great Christopher!" groaned Yuma Yank. "Why don't they kem out? It can't be they're goin' ter stay in thar an burn!"

Still the fire spread, and still those outside the cabin looked in vain for Dion and the woman to appear. Soon the entire building was wrapped in the devouring element, the blaze lighting the entire pocket and making the water of the little cascade sparkle like liquid jewels.

Still no one issued from the doomed cabin!

The cowboys became silent and awe-stricken, for they believed the man and woman had chosen to perish in the flames.

"Ef it hain't thet," muttered one, "then ther critter must be ther ole 'riginal Devil as kin stan' fire an' brimston!"

At length the roof of the burning cabin fell in, sending a cloud of sparks skyward, and the walls soon followed, leaving the crowd staring blank-

ly, silently, awe-stricken at a mass of redly glowing embers and blazing timbers.

Had the Diamond Sport and the mysterious woman voluntarily met their death in the flames?

If not—what?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BETRAYED AGAIN!

A SUPPER from antelope-steak broiled over hot coals and washed down by draughts of clear water from a living spring is not such a very bad meal for hungry men. Both the actor and poet carried a supply of salt, so they were not compelled to eat the meat without its being properly seasoned.

"By me faith!" quoth the tragedian, striking an attitude, one hand held aloft while the fingers of the other clasped a juicy piece of steak lately snatched from the coals. "This, methinks, is a feast fit for a king!"

"When hungry men have need of food, Such chuck as this is mighty good,"

asserted the poet, as he took a huge bite from a freshly captured slice of steak. Then he uttered a howl and quickly spat it out, excitedly observing:

"Great General Scott! You bet that's hot!"

"Thus greed is punished," asserted Shanks, hastily swallowing huge mouthfuls. "You should have delicacy enough to eat with some show of refinement," he added, fishing another slice off the coals and blowing on it to cool it. "Above all things, never make a beast of yourself, Robert."

"There is little danger when you are around!" snapped the poet. "A fellow don't get much of a chance to make a beast of himself. But you can do it for both of us."

Shanks turned a stagey glare of anger on his partner.

"Thus am I insulted by the creature I have taken to me bosom and permitted to share me fortunes!" he cried.

"Your misfortunes, you mean," nodded Shanks.

"What, ho! Who was it the dying miner told of the buried treasure in the old Aztec ruin?"

"Both of us, J. Wilkes—both, sir!"

"I deny it! He imparted the secret to me as I moistened his lips with water—fire-water."

"But I hears every word he uttered."

"Which shows your true character—a spy! a listener!"

"Do you charge me with this?"

"I do, false comrade!"

"Base wretch! you deserve death—yes, doubly deserve it! Were you one of my own noble blood—"

"Bosh!"

"Bosh, yourself!"

By this time the two seemed on the point of coming to blows, and the Silver-edged Sport interferred.

"Come, come!" said Seth, sternly. "This is no time for quarreling! Stop your chatter, and go on with your eating."

"Good advice," confessed the poet, and again he made an attack on the steak.

Gradually the tragedian came down from his high horse, but he contemptuously muttered, as he once more resumed his supper:

"Blue blood—bosh!"

Seth was silent and moody, his mind seeming occupied with other things than those around him.

The mules and the horse were grazing near at hand, eagerly devouring the none too nutritious bunch grass to be found in the little valley. Although the feed was poor, it was something to satisfy their hunger.

After supper the actor and poet seemed to feel better, for they patched up a truce and began discussing the prospect of finding the buried treasure, of which, it seemed, an old miner who was dying had told them. This old fellow had been crazy for years, and a shot from a man with whom he had got into trouble caused his death, but at the same time it restored his reason.

Shanks and Scraggs came upon the old miner lying beside the trail where he had fallen when stricken by the bullet of his foe. He was too weak to rise, and they saw his minutes were numbered. A drink of liquor from a flask in the actor's possession had enabled the old fellow to talk, and he had given them information which sent them on their journey to the Devil's Mountains.

The dying miner had claimed to be the only survivor of a party of six men penned into an old Aztec ruin by savages. They had been passing through the mountains on their way to New Mexico when the Indians came upon them. Confined within the old ruin, they had made a desperate fight, but hunger and thirst had finally driven them to despair, and they decided to make an attempt to cut their way through the red horde in the darkness. Some might escape.

Before leaving the ruin for their desperate attempt, all their worldly possessions of gold-

dust and nuggets had been *cached* where they thought there was little chance of their being ever discovered by others than the rightful owners.

The dash for life was made, and the dying miner who had been deranged for so many years, believed he was the only one to escape death by the savages' hands, and he had received the wound that affected his reason. Had he retained his right mind, he would have returned to the Devil's Mountains and recovered the buried treasure. As it was, it could never do him any good, so he surrendered his rights to Shanks and Scraggs, having no relatives he wished to wish to possess a portion of the hidden fortune.

This was the drift of the story, as they discussed it before Silver-edged Seth, seeming to take no heed of the giant's presence.

There was little need of their being cautious as far as Seth was concerned, for he scarcely heard a word they spoke. He was thinking—thinking of Agnes and the bitter fate that had allowed a dastardly villain to rend their lives asunder.

At length exhausted nature asserted herself, and the Goliath fell asleep on the blanket he had spread.

"He slumbers!" softly exclaimed Shanks. "We must have care n't to arouse him, for he has passed through much of an exhausting nature."

"One of us must stand guard while the other sleeps."

"Right you are, beloved comrade."

"I will assume the post of duty first."

"No, I will."

It was finally decided Shanks should act as guard the first part of the night, arousing Scraggs to take his place when the proper time came. When this was settled, the poet promptly rolled himself in his blanket and was soon fast asleep.

"Now look at the pig!" hissed the tragedian. "Had he insisted but a moment more, I would have given in to him. While he sleeps I must weary my already exhausted body by standing guard! Well, I fancy I shall find it convenient to catch a few cat-naps."

And in less than thirty minutes, he was as fast asleep as the others, much to the satisfaction of some unseen watchers of the camp.

As usual, Seth Culver dreamed of Agnes, but for once the dream did not begin with them in their old home. He dreamed he had found her there amid the mountains living with his brother. Then he had dragged Worth Warwick to her feet, and with a knife at the villain's throat, had forced him to confess his perfidy. Both Agnes and Valois had heard the words which fell from the dastard's lips, and the truth had fairly stunned them. Valois looked as if he were going mad, and it seemed that Agnes would fall dead in her tracks. Then, before their eyes, he had slain the wretch who worked the ruin of all.

After this, he stepped across the body to clasp the form of his rightful wife in his arms. But, she waved him back, crying out there was a black gulf between them; then she turned and fled. He followed, calling to her, feeling certain she was rushing to doom. Wildly he called, but she only turned to wave him a last farewell from the brink of a mighty chasm. Then she leaped out and went plunging down to death! He would have followed, but the form of Lois, his child, arose before him and he fell helpless on the ground, held back from death by her small white hand.

Then the scene suddenly changed. He fancied he was asleep, but in deadly danger. Suddenly the spirit form of his wife appeared in the air above him. She saw the danger he was in. At once she cried "Awake!" and—

He awoke!

The danger was not imaginary; it was genuine. Several dark figures sprung out of the gloom of night, the leader being the horrible Demon of the Mountains! The dull glow of the dying fire revealed that fact to the awakened giant, then, with a fiendish laugh, Devil Don struck Seth a terrible blow on the head with a heavy instrument.

Then came darkness—unconsciousness!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE DEMON'S CLUTCH.

THERE was no means by which Silver-edged Seth could afterward tell just how long he remained in an unconscious condition, but when his senses returned, he found himself lying on a floor of solid stone and in very nearly utter darkness.

Stirring slightly, he discovered his hands were firmly held behind him, and that slight motion caused the rattling of a chain to tell him how he was made secure. Iron manacles held his wrists together, and, on making a further stir, he found he was chained to the wall of rock.

He seemed to be in a sort of alcove in the rocks, past the face of which ran a passage. High up in the passage was a light, the rays of which scarcely touched him, as the light itself was beyond his sight.

He was alone, but the tread of feet in the rocky passage told there was a sentinel within hearing.

"My God!" groaned the unfortunate giant. "I feel certain I have again fallen into the clutch of my deadly enemy, Worth Warwick! It must indeed be true Satan aids his own, else the foul wretch could never be so successful!"

"Let's see, how comes it I am here? I can scarcely remember, for my head is throbbing with a dull pain and my brain seems confused. I came into the mountains, and I met Valois; I remember those things. I remember our talk. Then I went on. Who was with me?"

The self-put question seemed to puzzle him, and for some moments he was silent.

"There were two," he finally said. "I remember who they were. We camped in a little valley. I was exhausted and fell asleep. Then I dreamed—dreamed of Agnes. She was warning me of danger. I awoke, and—What followed!"

Again he was at a loss to remember, and the answer came not as readily as before, for, in awaking from that dream, he had scarcely become conscious of danger ere a crushing blow had robbed him of his senses.

As he was trying to solve the problem, the guard passed the mouth of the alcove and peered sharply in upon the prisoner. He was dressed in black and wore a cowl which concealed his features.

Only a short distance did the sentinel advance along the passage after he disappeared from Seth's sight, then the giant heard him returning. After again peering into the alcove, the dark-clothed figure went on and vanished.

A sudden thought came to the prisoner. The passage must end near at hand, else the guard would have advanced further in one direction. But this could be of little importance.

"It makes no difference!" groaned the giant, in despair. "I am a helpless prisoner in Worth Warwick's hands! Can it be God will allow that wretch to triumph? No, no, no!"

Seized by sudden fury and despair, he struggled desperately to break from the chain which held him fast to the wall. He was a very powerful man, and he exerted all of his great strength, but his captor had known the man well enough to make sure he could not get free of his own unaided efforts. The attempt was vain, and Seth fell back, uttering a bitter cry of agony.

That cry was answered. From somewhere beyond the wall to which he was made fast came the rattle of chains and the sound of a human voice.

Seth listened.

"Hello!"

The voice sounded familiar.

"Hello!" retorted the giant.

Then came the question:

"Who are you?"

"I am a captive in the hands of a detestable villain."

"And I am another," was the assertion. "They have taken good care to make me fast with chains; but, if there is such a thing as justice, I hope to live to get free, and make them suffer for it!"

"Your voice sounds familiar. Who are you?"

"Major Nepal Navrain, of the Twin Star Ranch!"

Seth was astounded.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "I am Seth Culver, whom you met in Kicker's Bar."

"I suspected it," was the retort. "You were missing when I returned to the ranch, and when I heard these wretched cattle-thieves bring in another prisoner, my first thought was it must be you. We have both fallen into the hands of that curse to this section of the country, Devil Don!"

"It seems as if you must be near that opening I can see in the wall. If you can reach it, we can converse easier, and, not having to lift our voices too high, there will be less danger of interference from the guard."

Seth looked for the opening spoken of, and soon discovered it. It was almost beyond his reach, but the chain at its fullest extent enabled him to look through the fissure.

He found himself gazing into another alcove, very much like the one in which he was confined. The light in the passage dimly illuminated the place, showing Major Navrain sitting with his hands confined behind him by a chain that was attached to the wall, nearly the same as that which held the Giant Sport.

The opening also enabled Seth to see the passage ended in front of this alcove, and to gain admission to it, a person must apparently pass in front of the place where Seth was confined.

By the dim light the major looked haggard and ghastly.

After this position had been obtained, the two men explained everything connected with their capture—or perhaps it would be more correct to say the Silver-edged Sport explained all he understood himself.

"I have tried to learn what they are going to do with me," said Major Navrain; "but, thus far, I have not been successful. Any act is not too vile for the wretch known as Devil Don. My only regret is that I did not arouse a section

of the country and bring a hundred men against the outlaw. I ought to have done so long ago, but the fears of the cowboys restrained me."

"My greatest regret," asserted Seth, "is that I was not able to read his dastardly heart years ago and give him the death he deserved."

"Then you think you have known him in the past?"

"I think so."

"Have you seen the creature since leaving Kicker's Bar?"

"Either I have seen him or I was deluded by an hallucination, the result of which was a broken mirror in the room where I slept at your ranch."

Then the giant told of his strange experience in the little room of the old hacienda.

The major seemed amazed.

"I think you must have been dreaming still when you fancied you were awake," he declared; "for I have no knowledge of any way Devil Don could get into the ranch and appear to you in such a manner. If there is an opening in the wall against which the mirror hangs, I have never discovered it."

The footsteps of the guard were heard returning, and the two men ceased talking for a time. The black-cowled fellow peered in sharply at them, but spoke no word. When they thought him again beyond hearing, conversation was resumed.

The major told Seth of the expedition into the mountains, giving him all the particulars which fell beneath his notice up to the time the point was reached where the two parties were to unite. He had already given a vivid description of the manner in which he was made a captive by the Demon.

Then Seth related the events of the night up to his release from his dead horse by the actor and poet. His brain was getting clearer, and he remembered everything distinctly.

He had barely finished his story when the guard suddenly and silently appeared.

"Ha!" growled the disguised fellow, coming into the alcove and discovering the opening in the wall. "So you fellers hev foun' er peep-hole? Wal, I reckon I'll hev ter plug et, an' you critters best shet yer yawp, ef ye don't want ter be kerried whar ye can't speak ter each other a tall. Now dry up on yer chinnin', Old Big-ness!"

The man's manner was so insulting the giant's blood leaped, and he longed to lay hands on the guard. However, he restrained his feelings as much as possible.

Lifting quite a large stone, the guard thrust it into the opening, making it impossible for the two men to see each other.

"Thet fixes it!" he chuckled, with satisfaction.

Leaving the alcove, he entered that where the major was confined, and Seth heard him roundly abusing Navrain. The old soldier made some hot retorts, and the guard threatened to have him gagged, if he did not keep still.

"You cowardly cur!" grated the major. "If I were only free—"

Then Seth heard a rattling of chains, as if Major Navrain was making a mad effort to break loose.

"It bain't nary bit of use, ole cock," sneered the guard. "You can't do it, an' you might as well cool down. But you want ter 'member w'at I said an' keep still 'less ye want ter be gagged. Thet's biz!"

The old soldier made no reply, and a few moments later, the guard left the alcove. He passed before the one occupied by the Goliath, and his footsteps seemed to die out in the distance, but Seth felt sure he was within earshot, listening for further conversation.

The major and the Sport made no further efforts to communicate just then.

Possibly twenty minutes passed, then hasty footsteps were heard in the passage. Following the sound of advancing steps there was a wild, blood-chilling laugh. Then a horrible, blood-red figure danced into the alcove where the Sport was confined.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is one of my birds—this is one! A huge one it is, but he will sizzle all the better when I get ready to cast him into the fire! Hell is waiting for him!"

It was Devil Don, the Demon of the Mountains!

At a glance Seth perceived the face was the same as he saw, or fancied he saw, in the little room at the hacienda. It was horrible enough to look upon, and the helpless giant eagerly scanned it for some familiar feature that would make sure his conviction that Worth Warwick and the Demon were one and the same.

In vain! If there was anything familiar about those features, the hideous working of the man's face, the yellow, protruding tusches, the eyeless socket—these things disguised them.

Bending forward, Devil Don peered into the face of the captive, then uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"This is not the one I want to see!" he cried, harshly, glaring around. "Where is the other? If those whelps of mine have allowed him a chance to escape, they shall take a dance on red-hot coals as punishment! They shall sizzle and

scorch! I will deliver them to my master, the Evil One!"

Suddenly he wheeled and ran out of the alcove, passing into the one beyond. Then a harsh cry of delight came from his lips.

"Here he is—here's the dog! Ha, ha! This is the one I am going to give a jolly roast! He shall sizzle and fry in the merry flames!"

"Get out, you spawn of Satan!" cried the voice of the rancher.

Judging by his wild laughter, this filled the Demon with great delight.

"You call me that? Well, I am—I am! I have sold my soul to the devil, that's why I am here—that's why you are here, Major Nepal Navrain! You do not understand that? I know you do not! Well, you shall understand it soon! Some fools think I am the devil himself, but I am not. I am simply his servant. I sold my soul to him for—what? For revenge! There were those I hated bitterly, and you were one. To get revenge I was willing to do anything. The devil promised me revenge in exchange for my soul! Ha, ha, ha! A jolly bargain that! The King of Evil showed me the way to his domain, and this cave is on the road! Yes, it is! And you—you are going there! With my own hands, I will thrust you into the very mouth of hell!"

Then the fiend laughed—a horrible sound.

"But before that time," he went on, "I am to have the satisfaction of torturing you, of pounding you, of doing anything I please to you! After you are once in the fiery pit I will no longer be able to torture you; others will have to attend to that. But, before you go, I will beat you sore! Now you have it! Ha, ha, ha!"

Seth plainly heard the sound of blows, as if he the Demon were carrying out his threat.

"Oh, if this stone were only out of the way!" thought the giant.

As if in answer to his wish, the rock rolled out of the opening in the wall, giving the Goliath an opportunity to witness what was transpiring in the adjoining alcove.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE AZTEC RUIN.

It would be difficult to portray the amazement and dismay with which the cowboys saw Diamond Dion's cabin burn to the ground without either man or woman making an appearance. They could not understand it, and Yuma Yank was as greatly puzzled as any one.

"It's jest derved queer!" the old miner muttered, gazing at the smoking embers. "I don't 'low ther Sport wuz ther man ter be roasted erlive thet way."

The old fellow sat down by himself, and he appeared to remain in a brown study for a long time. Finally, he sprang up, catching Loyal by the arm drawing him aside:

"I hev it, lad, I hev it!" and the round-shouldered veteran fairly danced with excitement, yet took good care not to be overheard by the cattlemen.

"What is it you have, old man? You act like you had St. Vitus's dance."

"Sh! I've got it through my head at last! This is ther very place!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jest you foller me, an' I'll show ye."

Yank led the way toward the waterfall, and Loyal followed close to his heels. Their movements seemed to attract no attention from their companions, and, as the light of the burning timbers of the cabin was becoming less with each passing second, they were well within the line of shadow when the cascade was reached.

"One o' ther fellers as I oncet talked with 'bout these yer mountains stuck ter it he hed bin hyer," said Yank, speaking with caution. "More then that, he told o' this very pocket, though I didn't take no stock in his yarn. I thought he wus crookin' it, but now I reckons he tole ther truth. Ef he did, I'll show ye suthin' in er minute."

Having made this declaration, Yank advanced to the face of the wall near the cataract at a point where a mass of vines clung to the rocks.

"Thar might be rattlers hyer," he observed, as he picked up a stick and thrust it into the vines. "I don't keer 'bout nosin' roun' in thar with my han's, so—B'gash! I've hit it!"

Instantly the old man dropped the stick and parted the vines with his hands, revealing a dark opening in the rocky wall beyond.

"The mouth of a cave!" and Loyal seemed disappointed. "What has this to do with the escape of Diamond Dion and the beautiful woman?"

"Mebbe northin'; mebbe heap. Jest hole yer hosses, lad, an' we'll 'splore things er mite. Nose roun' an' git some bits thet'll do fer torches. We're goin' inter this yar hoel."

Loyal followed his comrade's direction, and soon they were provided with several pieces of resinous wood which could be used as torches. When they were ready to enter the opening, Yank sought to make sure their movements were not watched. He saw nothing suspicious about the moves of the cowboys, who were gathered around the still blazing ruins. The vines were parted sufficiently to allow the passage

of a person, then the two entered the opening, Yank leading.

Within the cave the old miner paused to read-just the vines so they would conceal the orifice. "Ef they look fer us, they'll be ap'ter wonder whar we are goin'," he chuckled. I don't 'magine they'll fine this hoel."

"How long shall we be absent, Yank?"

"Mebbeer right good bit; mebbe more, mebbe less," was the unsatisfactory answer.

"But they may take a notion to leave the pocket, in which case we should be in a decidedly bad fix, for they would undoubtedly take our horses."

"They won't go afore mornin', lad, an' we'll be back long afore thet. We're jest goin' on er leetle 'zaminin' trip. Ther feller as I wuz speakin' of tole me 'bout this yar place. Ther passage runs right back under ther waterfall."

Together they moved in a short distance, then Yank ignited one of the torches. The light showed them a narrow passage about ten or twelve feet in height. The rough, jagged walls were very damp.

"Thar might be sech er thing as a pleasanter place, b'gash!" asserted the veteran of the pick and pan.

"What is your object in coming here, Yank?"

"I'll show ye, boy. Foller me."

In less than a minute they came to a place where a flight of rude steps led down into a sort of side passage, the one they were in continuing onward uninterruptedly. Yank chuckled again when he saw the steps.

"It's jest as ther critter said!" he averred. "Now you come on, pard, an' I'll show ye how Diamond Dion 'scaped roastin'."

Loyal followed the old man down the steps, and they found themselves in a passage much smaller than the one above. Plainly it had been laboriously excavated by the hand of man.

"I can smell smoke!" cried Loyal.

Yank said nothing, but in a short time they came to a point where the smoke was quite thick.

"Thar hain't no use o' goin' fuder," declared the miner. "It's jest as ther feller tole me. This yar hoel runs under whar ther Diamon' Sport's cabing wuz. Hean' ther woman 'scaped roastin' 'by gittin' out through this place. It wuz all ready fer jest sech a 'casion."

And Yank had hit upon the truth. By means of the passage, which came up beneath the cabin, the inmates of the burning cabin had escaped falling into the hands of the enraged cowboys or meeting death in the flames.

Rollins led the way back to the other passage. There a consultation was held, and they decided to follow the passage a piece and see where it would take them. Another torch was lighted, and they started on.

The passage proved much longer than they had expected. Indeed, they almost began to fear they would never reach its termination, for they advanced along its winding course for nearly an hour. At places it was somewhat difficult to proceed, but on the whole, there were few difficulties.

Finally they came to what appeared to be the end of the passage. A flight of stone steps led upward to what seemed a roofing of solid rock.

Yank ascended the steps first, and Loyal held the light while he made an examination. As a result, a slab of stone was found to swing freely on a pivot, and when it was tipped, they were enabled to ascend. This they did.

To the amazement of the young Denverite, they found themselves in an old ruin of stone and adobe, a building that had evidently been of some pretensions in its day.

Curiously they looked around. The light of their last torch was dying. They would have to procure others before they could return through the passage.

Suddenly Loyal uttered a cry:

"By heavens!"

"W'at is it, lad?"

"I believe this is the old Aztec ruin we are in search of! If so, our search is ended! There is only one thing more to look for, and that is—"

"Death, if you stir hand or foot!"

To the amazement of Loyal and the old miner, half a dozen men sprang out of the darkness, leveling weapons at the heads of the intruders in the old ruin. Bright lights were turned on them, then came the cry:

"Hands up, or die!"

They were trapped!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HATRED OF A HUMAN FIEND.

THE Silver-edged Sport instantly placed himself in a position that enabled him to look into the adjoining alcove. What he saw made his blood fairly boil with fury.

The Scarlet Demon was crouching over the unfortunate man bound to the wall by heavy chains, and with his clinched hands Devil Don was beating the other. As the victim's hands were confined behind him, it was plain he could make no resistance.

"Ha! ha! ha!" screamed the Demon. "What fun! It was this for which I sold my soul to Satan, and now I am more than satisfied with the bargain!"

That the major was a man of nerve seemed apparent.

"He does not reply," thought Seth. "He turns his face to the wall and remains silent, but I can understand the fury in his heart! He is a soldier, and he would utter no sound if the fiend were killing him."

Suddenly the Demon ceased to beat his victim, shifted his position a trifle, and demanded:

"Don't you know me now, Nepal Navrain?"

There was no reply.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the wretch in scarlet. "You are in the sulks, eh? Well, sulk it out, my gallant officer! It does me good to see you show such spirit. I fancy you want me to tell you who I am?"

Crouching in a fantastic position, the Demon glared down at the iron-bound man.

"You need not speak, my dear Nepal, if you do not wish," he sneered. "I will not compel you, though I well know I could. I shall have the pleasure of hearing you beg mercy very soon—beg like a dog!"

The chained man moved his head as if about to speak, but he seemed to suddenly change his mind, for he once more turned his head to the wall, remaining silent.

"Yes, I shall have the pleasure of hearing your entreaties for mercy. You will beg like a dog when I drag you to the very mouth of the fiery pit! Let me tell you something, Nepal: Before another day has passed you shall roast in eternal flames!"

The threat caused the Silver-edged Sport to shudder, for it was uttered in a vindictive manner indescribable. The Scarlet Demon plainly had the heart of a demon, indeed!

"But to tell you who I am," continued Devil Don. "You should know me, since it was your hand that dealt the blow which robbed me of one good eye. Ha! you start! I fancy you begin to understand. Yes, I am Byron Royston, the man you struck senseless at your feet with the flat of your sword! That blow robbed me of my eye and came near ending my life. I swore to have bitter revenge, and now my day has come!"

The listening man stirred slightly, but still he remained firm to his resolve to make no talk with the fiend.

"I was a good soldier, Nepal Navrain, and you know it. My bravery was often spoken of, and but for you I would have risen from the ranks. Your influence kept me down. I knew it, and I hated you. The hatred was mutual, I fancy. Still I did nothing to give you a good chance to vent your spite on me. You were continually watching for such an opportunity, and I knew it."

"Why did you hate me so, Nepal Navrain? Was it because of the old score of many years before? I had almost forgotten that, but you—you remembered. You could not forgive me for winning a beautiful woman from you. I was handsome in those old days, Nepal! Who would believe it now? Your coward's blow was the first stroke to rob me of my good looks and make me the demon I am! Hatred and time have disfigured me, till I look more like a fiend than a human being. But I delight in my horrible-ness—I delight in it! It strikes terror to the heart of my foes! Since I sold myself to Satan, I have tried to become as terrible as possible."

"You said I was drunk and insulted you. That was your excuse for striking a private soldier with your sword. Perhaps I had been drinking, Nepal, but my only insult was the look my eyes gave. I saluted as a private should salute his superior. You uttered a cry of rage and struck me with the flat side of your sword, sending me reeling to the ground! Oh, curse you! what a coward's blow it was!"

The Demon seemed on the point of once more falling on the helpless man and beating him, but, restraining himself, he went on:

"I was taken to the hospital. There inflammation set in, the pain in my eye fairly driving me frantic. Oh, the suffering I endured! How I cursed you then! I only asked to live for revenge! I prayed that I might live to square the score. They said I was mad. I was!"

"Had I received proper attention, my eye might have been saved; but with the surge of war all around us, men being brought in with shattered limbs and ghastly wounds, it was little wonder I was neglected. The inflammation in my eye affected the other eye, and I was in danger of losing the sight of both. Then an inexperienced surgeon examined my eyes and said the only way to save my sight at all was to remove the worst one. I was powerless in his hands, for he gave me a drug. I recovered to find one of my good eyes gone."

"I was discharged, Nepal, and I left the army; but I did not forget. I remembered to whom I owed the loss of my good eye."

"I found the woman I loved had proved false to me, and that made me a still more bitter man—that added some of the fiend to my already imbibed nature. I followed her and her lover till I saw them both lying dead at my feet! That was in Italy. I fled, and to this day the cause of their death—or the one who caused it, rather, has remained unknown."

"Then I remembered you, Nepal. Then I had become a fiend. Then I plotted for revenge."

But I was not to be satisfied my merely taking your life. I asked more; I wanted you to suffer as I had suffered. But how was I to bring that about? That was a question which troubled me."

"One night as I lay plotting, plotting—thinking, thinking—I suddenly called on the devil to aid me, saying I would give him my soul in exchange for revenge. In an instant Satan himself appeared before me and accepted the pledge, declaring I should have all the revenge I asked, if I would swear my soul should be his as payment."

"Ha! ha! ha! Now you start! now you look at me, Nepal! You think I am mad! But I am not. I tell you the devil came to me exactly as I have said. Of course, I was frightened, but I quickly recovered, and in a short time we made a bargain. The fiend made me repeat a solemn oath binding myself to him, then he vanished."

"I will confess my revenge has been slow in coming, but I have spent many agreeable years contemplating how sweet it would be when it did come. You may wonder why I have not struck at you before. I was not ready. I wished to see you prosperous and happy, then I would cut you down in the midst of your prosperity. That time has come. Life to you means much; to me it means *revenge*! I confess I was not intending to deliver the blow so soon, but you have thrust yourself into my power, and now nothing can save you!"

"How do you like the prospect, old comrade? Is it not inviting?"

Seth Culver had caught nearly every word as it fell from the Demon's lips, and now the giant was more puzzled than ever.

"Can it be that is Worth Warwick?" he muttered. "No, no! At times his voice sounds like that of my old enemy, but he cannot be that devil. Still Warwick is fully as fiendish as this creature with a heart of stone. What mates they would make!"

"It is impossible for me to understand what yonder Scarlet Devil can have against me if he is not Warwick. And if he has nothing against me, why was I captured and brought here? The riddle is too deep for me."

Seth was thus muttering when the dark-attired guard came silently into the alcove. The sentinel uttered a low exclamation of rage as he saw the stone had rolled out of the wall, and with considerable haste, he replaced it, once more cutting off the giant's view of the other alcove.

"Now you let thet alone!" the fellow growled. "It hain't goin' ter be healthy fer you if I find it out erg'in!"

With this, he gave the Goliath a kick and turned from the alcove to the passage.

"I would like the privilege of having you under my bare hands for about two minutes, you dog!" muttered the Silver-edged Sport.

The sentinel heard but did not understand, though he cast a look over his shoulder as he turned into the passage.

The voice of the Demon had sunk till Seth was now unable to distinguish his words. He seemed to have worked off some of the excitement which controlled him at first, and now his anger was that of the hissing serpent.

"I must escape in some way!" thought the giant. "I cannot allow the battle to end now and Worth Warwick escape my vengeance! Oh, for the strength of Samson of old that I might rend these chains!"

But he made no attempt to break free, experience having taught him the folly of such effort.

Devil Don continued to threaten and sneer above the chained man in the other alcove, and only once did Seth recognize Major Navrain's voice. Once the ex-officer apparently allowed his anger to master his will.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Demon. "I have aroused you, at last! Well, I will confess you can command your tongue much better than I could in a similar position. Still you will have use enough for it soon. You will grovel at my feet and beg for life!"

"Never!"

"You say so now; but we shall see. Your time is not far off, but I have other work to do before disposing of you. I have planned a grand final act with amazing scenic and dramatic effects. It will be astonishing. There are others besides yourself to take part in it."

A few moments later the Demon left the alcove and entered that where Seth was confined. He paused with folded arms, his one gleaming eye glaring down at the iron-bound giant. Seth returned the gaze squarely, waiting for the fiend to speak.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A BREATH FROM HADES.

HE did not have to wait a great while, though seconds seemed like minutes just then.

"You are wondering what I have against you," declared Devil Don. "You are puzzled to understand the motive of the Scarlet Fiend in bringing you here and making you a captive. I can read your thoughts. I could explain everything with a word, but I prefer to have you puzzle your brain over the problem."

When I see fit to pull down the wires, the secret will stand revealed."

Although speaking thus calmly the Demon's face was contorted till it was repulsive to look upon.

"You are right," confessed the Silver-edged Sport. "I cannot understand it at all."

"You have an enemy."

"Yes; a miserable dastard!"

Devil Don laughed shrilly.

"It is such I choose as companions! He has a heart of fire—a heart like my own!—But, why am I talking here with you? I will leave you to your own thoughts for a time. Pleasant thoughts they must be!"

With another laugh, he passed out of the alcove and disappeared.

For a long time, Seth lay silently thinking, thinking, trying to understand the strange muddle in which he had become involved. Could it be possible that Demon was the man he had known as Worth Warwick? He had thought so till he heard the fiend's story told above the helpless man he seemed to hate so bitterly. But, if that story was true, then Devil Don and Worth Warwick could not be the same.

"His face is not that of Warwick," thought Seth, "though his figure is much the same. But the face of the Demon is plainly made up in a great many respects. Those yellow teeth are not natural; they are added to make his aspect more ferocious. His face is painted. Yes, he may be Warwick."

The Sport Goliath still clung to that belief, it having become so fixed in his mind that he hated to relinquish it though he could not understand how it could be true. For a time he forgot the existence of Major Navrain.

A groan that came from the adjoining alcove aroused him, and he called:

"Major."

Again the groan, then an answer.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked Seth.

"Not in body," was Major Nepal's reply; "but I am in spirit. That cur—that infernal dog! He beat me with his hands! That was worse than gall and wormwood, though the blows caused but little pain. Oh, for freedom to meet him face to face!"

"There is little chance to escape the Demon's clutch, major."

"But I must escape in some way—I must!"

"Easier said than done."

"That is true. Did you hear anything that passed while he was here?"

"I heard nearly everything."

"Then you know who he is. I was never more astounded in all my life than when I became aware he was Byron Royston. If you heard what passed, you must know we were rivals in love once. That was before the war. He was the successful one, winning the love of a beautiful girl who was very dear to me. They were just married when war was declared. I was desperate and sought forgetfulness, if not death, in the great struggle. I raised a company which Royston joined, trying to purchase or secure a commission. In this he was unsuccessful, and the command of the company was given to me. He hated me anyway, and his hatred grew day by day. I bore more from him than I would from any other man on earth, but one day he overstepped the limit. I was hot-tempered in those days, and I struck him with the drawn sword I held in my hand. I confess I regretted the blow the instant it was given, but it was then too late to recall it. He was stunned for the time, and he afterward lost the sight of one eye. He was discharged and I lost sight of him, though I heard he had gone in pursuit of his wife and a man with whom she had eloped. Till a few minutes ago I never knew the result of that hunt."

Then the story was true, and Devil Don was what he had claimed! That seemed to settle one point: he could not be Worth Warwick. Seth knew it was impossible for Worth Warwick and Byron Royston, a soldier in the Confederate Army, to be one and the same.

Then the giant arrived at a conclusion: If Devil Don was not Worth Warwick himself, Warwick was in league with the Demon. In case that was true, he could readily understand why he had been made a prisoner by the outlaws.

As he was thinking this over, he heard the sentinel approaching. The man stopped and glared in upon him, growling:

"I jest want you critters ter stop yer yoopin' at each other, d'yer hear? Them's orders from ther chief, an' ef they hain't beyed thar'll be merry thunder ter pay. Now you keep still!"

Then he went to the other alcove and repeated the words, ending with a threat to gag the major. Navrain called for a drink of water, saying he was dying of thirst, and the guard went away to get it.

When the man was beyond hearing, the old soldier cautiously called:

"I say, Culver."

"Yes, major."

"Is there no way you can get clear?"

"I can discover none just now."

"Let me tell you what I think: I believe I can free this chain from the rocks. I do not know as that will do the least bit of good, for when I

do that, how am I to get free from the chain and manacles?"

That was a question Seth could not answer.

"I think I will yet find a way to escape, asserted the major. "If I do, I will never know a minute's rest till Devil Don is dead!"

They made no further talk just then, fearing to be overheard, and in a short time the guard came with the water. After the major had satisfied his thirst, the fellow once more cautioned them against talking, asserting he would gag them if they did. Then he retreated.

Perhaps half an hour passed, no word being exchanged between Seth and Nepal, then the heavy tread of feet was heard. Four large outlaws appeared and entered the alcove where the Silver-edged Sport was confined.

"The chief has sent for you," announced one. "We have come to conduct you to his presence."

He produced a key and unlocked the huge padlock which held the chain to the iron staple set in the solid rock, leaving the chain and manacles still attached to Seth's wrists.

"We do not propose to give you a chance to exhibit your strength on us," assured one of the outlaws.

"Not by er derved sight!" chimed in another.

At the word, the Giant Sport arose, and in their midst he was conducted along the passage, two of the masked men walking with a hand on his shoulder, one of the others going before them, and the other following.

The passage was not very long, but it made several turns. Finally, they came out into quite a large chamber that was brilliantly lighted by several burning jets of natural gas which issued from small holes in the walls and roof. The atmosphere of the chamber was very warm, though Seth could not believe all the heat came from the gaslights.

For a moment the giant was almost blinded by the glare of light, which was reflected in places from broad patches of the walls where some crystal formations glittered like huge clusters of precious gems. These scintillating crystals made the place seem like a fairy grotto.

Across the floor which had been leveled by the hand of man the prisoner was conducted, towering a whole head above the tallest of his guards.

In front of a platform of stone they halted. On the platform was what appeared to be a stone throne.

Barely had they assumed their positions in front of the platform when there came a rumbling roar as of distant thunder. Ominously the sound boomed through the underground arches, seeming like the knell of doom.

Each one of the guards bowed his head, saying in unison with the others:

"The Great Chief, the most noble servant of Satan, he comes! The thunders of the fiery depths announce his approach!"

Seth remained silent, a scornful smile on his face. If they thought to strike terror to his heart by their silly trickery, he resolved they should fail.

Once more there was a rumble as of thunder, but this time the sound was louder than before.

Then it seemed that the solid wall of stone at the back of the throne was rent asunder, and out into the lighted chamber poured a scorching breath of air that truly seemed to come from the mouth of a fiery furnace. It was withering in its sudden intensity.

Through the opening stepped the Scarlet Demon of the Mountains; then the fissure closed behind him!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PIT OF FIRE.

THE four guards saluted as the Demon appeared, and Devil Don advanced and seated himself on the stone throne.

"I see you have brought the prisoner, as directed," he said.

"We have, Great Chief," replied the dark-robed men, in unison.

In his hand the Demon held a scepter what seemed to be a petrified rattlesnake stretched at full length. He made a motion with this, saying:

"It is well."

The guards saluted again, and then fell back three steps, remaining ready for instant work should they receive the command.

Silver-edged Seth faced the Demon boldly, his head erect, his eyes flashing, never seeming more a noble man than at that moment. There was no sign of fear in his aspect, and the fiend seemed more repulsive than ever, when compared with him.

Possibly Devil Don understood this, for he laughed shrilly, crying:

"You look grand, indeed, but you are in my power. With a crook of my finger I can send you to a most horrible death. You do not understand my power yet, I plainly see."

Seth did not speak; he had nothing to say.

"So you would try Navrain's trick!" snarled the fiend, in anger. "Beware! You know nothing of my fury!"

"I care nothing for it," was the calm retort.

For a moment Devil Don seemed too angry to speak, but he finally broke into his usual laugh—a laugh that was simply diabolical.

"That is because you are a fool!" he asserted. "You have lived some years in this world, but you have not lived long enough to learn everything. You do not fear because you have not learned what fear is. You shall learn before another hour passes! I will give you a glimpse of the fiery world below!"

Seth fully believed the man was mad. Who but a madman would thus disport himself? That was the only reasonable explanation of the creature's wild freaks.

"I imagine you are still wondering for what reason I had you brought here," continued Don.

"Well, I will explain to you now. I told you I chose your enemy as my companion. That enemy is the one you once knew as Worth Warwick."

"Ah!"

The exclamation escaped the giant's lips for all of his effort at self-control.

"That starts you," sneered the fiend. "And, well it may! Warwick hates you even as I hate Nepal Navrain. We are a well-mated pair. Ha! ha!"

"Where is Worth Warwick now? If you speak the truth, why isn't he here?"

"You are growing interested, which pleases me. I am glad to see it, I assure you. Warwick is my lieutenant, and he is now on duty."

"On duty?"

"Yes; with several of my men, he is watching Major Navrain's gallant cow-punchers who were fools enough to enter these mountains."

"Does he know I am here?"

"He does."

"Bah! I do not believe it!"

"Believe it or not, as you choose."

"If he knew I were here, nothing could keep him away."

"That is where you make an error. He is under my orders, and not one of my men dare disobey. But, that is not his entire reason for staying away. I fancy you will see him before long, and with him will come others you know."

"Who?"

Again the Demon laughed.

"It delights me to see you thus interested! You have asked me who he will bring. He will bring a man and a woman."

"Great heavens! not—not—"

"Diamond Dion and the woman he calls his wife? Yes, those are the ones. He has resolved to make his revenge complete at once, for he fears death may rob him of it if he delays. He believed death had robbed him last night, and that is why he had determined to end it all as soon as possible."

Seth gazed searchingly at the fiend, but it was impossible to tell if the creature were lying. His contorted face hid the truth the giant sought.

"You have come to the Devil's Mountains to die!" declared the Scarlet Demon, laughing again. "But you will suffer before you perish. You shall see the faces of those you love; you shall know they are in the power of your bitterest enemy."

The Sport closed his lips to keep back the groan which arose to them, for his thoughts turned to Lois and—Agnes. Devil Don nodded with satisfaction.

"That hits you in a tender spot! I knew it would. The girl is very fair, and my lieutenant says he shall make her his wife. When you are dead and burned to a cinder he will be holding her in his possession."

"You lie!" burst from Seth's lips—"you lie like the imp of darkness you are! God will not permit such a thing!"

"He will not interfere, for already she has passed the outer portal to Satan's domain. Did you ever hear there was an opening to the fiery pit somewhere amid these mountains? It is true, and this cave is on the road to the regions below!"

But the Sport Goliath scarcely noticed the preposterous statement, his thoughts being of those he loved, for, to tell the truth, his old love for Agnes was not entirely dead in his heart.

The Demon made a horrible grimace as he saw his words had fallen on unheeding ears.

"Do you hear?" he cried. "You have already passed the portals of hades!"

"I can almost believe it," was Seth's reply.

"You might be Satan himself."

"No, not Satan, but a d-voted servant. I see you think I am trying to frighten you. Ha, ha, ha! I can easily convince you I speak the truth—nothing but the truth. You shall have a glimpse into the fiery furnace!"

He sprang to his feet, uttering a loud cry. Immediately the wall behind the stone throne parted again, and once more the blast of hot air rushed forth.

"A breath from the lower regions!" chuckled the Scarlet Demon, as he advanced upon the iron-bound Sport. "Come, if you dare! I will show you the flames! You shall have a look into the pit! Come! If you do not come of your own accord, I will cause my servants to drag you there! Will you come?"

For a single instant did Seth hesitate, then he said:

"I have no desire to be dragged, so lead the way. I will follow."

"Good! You shall see how Devil Don serves his enemies! You shall witness an underground tragedy! Come!"

He led the way toward the opening from which the heated air was rushing forth, and Seth Culver followed, with a steady step. Silently the four guards fell in behind.

When they had entered the passage, the fiend clasped one of Seth's arms with a strong hand. A feeling of repulsion ran over the Giant, but he made no move to throw off the hand.

As they passed through the opening, Seth endeavored to see by what mechanism the wall which seemed like solid stone was made to part. Of course, he understood the wall must be of skillfully painted wood, but he was unable to discover how it was worked.

As soon as they were fairly within the passage, the Sport saw there was a gleam of light ahead.

The Demon laughed, as if he understood what was passing in the Giant's mind.

"It is far, far away," he declared. "Yet the light can be seen all this distance. That is a gleam from the pit!"

Toward what were they advancing? Was there in truth a furnace of fire there in that underground region? The glare ahead and the heated air which now struck them full in the face seemed to indicate there was more in the fiend's words than Seth had thought.

As they advanced the heat grew more intense.

"It is still a long way off," laughed Devil Don, fiendish satisfaction apparent in his face. "Do you think you can stand the heat? If you can, you shall witness a grand and terrible spectacle. You must stand it!"

"Go on!" came firmly from Seth's lips. "I can follow anywhere you may lead."

"But I am not going to lead; we are going side by side, like loving brothers! Loving brothers! Ha! ha! ha! That is good! I scarcely think there is any love lost between us. I hate you for Worth Warwick's sake; and I know you hate me in return. Why shouldn't you? I had rather have your hatred than your love. It is my delight to be hated!"

With each step the light grew brighter and the heat became greater. Seth breathed with difficulty, still he did not hesitate to go on. He knew the creature by his side was nothing but a human being, and felt he could follow where the fantastic fiend might lead.

And so, gasping for breath, they continued till the glare of light was almost unbearable. When they first entered the passage, Seth heard a distant muttering roar, and this sound increased as they went forward. What it was he could not imagine.

Suddenly they came to a bend in the passage, and there before them a sheet of flame seemed to shut off their advance. It was that which had made the glaring light, and the giant saw it was a burning burst of natural gas.

Still he could not understand the roaring sound, which now seemed to come from beyond the rocky wall. The gas-flame at which he looked till his eyeballs ached was not sufficient to make all that sound.

"You do not understand it?" shouted the Demon, in delight. "Well, I will show you the secret. Ha! ha! You shall look into hades!"

From a belt around his waist he took an iron hook, and with that he tore open a heavy door set in the solid wall. In a moment the roar became deafening, the heat was like that of a furnace, and when Seth looked through the open door, he reeled, blinded for a moment by the terrible glare.

The Demon danced and shouted with delight, but his words could not be heard above the roaring.

In a moment the giant recovered, and a second look showed him the flames were not at hand, as he had thought, but were a long distance away. Had they been as near as he thought, it would have been impossible to live in the passage. Again he saw the flames were caused by burning natural gas.

Dancing like the fiend he was, the Scarlet Demon pointed at the glaring furnace, his face the picture of evil delight. Then he placed his repulsive face close to that of his prisoner's and screamed:

"Hell! hell! hell!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TRIUMPHANT VILLAINY.

In truth, it seemed they were at the very mouth of the fiery pit. The heat was so intense that they could scarcely breathe.

Of a sudden, the fiend closed the door as quickly as he had opened it, and again his hand fell on the giant's arm.

With a cry, Seth tore himself from that grasp.

"Hands off, devil!" he shouted, his attitude one of defiance, despite the fact that his hands were held fast by the manacles. "I will not be polluted by your touch!"

Devil Don laughed, wildly.

"You begin to understand!" he cried. "You now see I told you no lie when I said I sold my

soul to Satan for revenge. The Evil One showed me this entrance to hades. How would you like to be thrust in there?"

Seth made no reply.

"You would not like it—oh, no! But that may be your fate! That has been the fate of men before you! There was a traitor to the band—I caught him—with my own hands I thrust him into that furnace!"

A fiend, in truth, did the scarlet creature seem just then.

"Your eyes are full of horror," laughed the fiend. "That is what I like to see. Let me tell you something: Into that furnace I will thrust Major Nepal Navrain! Into that furnace my lieutenant may thrust you, Seth Culver!"

"Oh, if I but had my freedom for one moment!" grated the Goliath.

"What would you do?"

"Lay you dead at my feet. If I placed my clutch upon you, nothing should save you—not even Satan, your acknowledged master!"

"But the irons are strong, and my men are near. There is no hope for you. Your time will be short when Warwick returns. He should be back now. We will return to the grand chamber. Come."

The Demon thrust Seth on in advance, and the giant was not reluctant to leave the hot passage. As he advanced he saw the four guards retreating before him, keeping at a certain distance. In that manner they returned to the chamber where stood the stone throne, and the wall closed behind them.

In front of the throne stood a masked man, who fell on his knees as the Scarlet Demon appeared.

"Arise, Diabold," commanded Devil Don. "What message do you bring?"

"The lieutenant has returned, Great Chief, and wishes me to report perfect success."

"Good! Tell him his victim awaits him in the Jeweled Chamber."

The fellow bowed low, saluted and rushed away.

"Now I must relinquish you into the hands of your bitterest enemy," said Devil Don, turning to Seth. "I have had my little sport with you; he claims you. From this moment he is all-powerful, till he has done with you as he sees fit. Farewell."

A moment later he was gone.

The guards remained around the prisoner, watching him carefully. Seth made no move, for he well understood the folly of attempting escape. Unless some most remarkable thing took place, he was doomed.

At least twenty minutes passed in silence, only the faint roar of the great furnace being heard in the chamber. Then, attended by two dark-robed figures, Worth Warwick appeared, his face hidden by a mask.

Straight toward the Giant the man advanced. A few feet from Seth he halted.

"Down with him, guards!" cried the villain. "Make him fast to the ring in the floor!"

But, bound by iron though he was, the four men found it no easy task to hurl the Goliath to the floor. They finally succeeded, and Seth was made fast to an iron ring.

Then Warwick bent over his victim, nodding with satisfaction.

"You are at my feet," he cried. "I wipe them on you, Seth Culver!" and he did so.

"Which is a daring thing for you to do!" sneered the helpless giant. "I wonder at your bravery."

Warwick did not seem to mind the taunt, but continued:

"I thought death had robbed me of you, but you were saved to perish by my hand. Oh, my triumph is sweet—sweet! How I have hated!"

He folded his arms and stood staring down at the helpless man. For at least five minutes he remained thus, neither speaking a word. At length, he gave a start, as if waking from a reverie.

"I should be happy now!" he muttered. "I ought to be satisfied, but I am not. It does not give me the pleasure I thought it would. My thirst seems almost sated, and I might end it all now. If I do not destroy this man, he will do his best to destroy me."

For a few seconds he seemed undecided, then he crouched beside Silver-edged Seth.

"Why is it that for which we have the greatest longing gives us so little satisfaction when we have it within our possession?" he said, as if asking the question of his victim. "All these years I have longed for revenge on you; but now it is within my grasp, I scarcely care to take it."

"Revenge! My God! Have you not had enough?"

"Perhaps so, perhaps so! Still I will not stay my hand now. Those you love best are within my power. All your friends in these parts are my captives. If I do not take your life, I will have the pleasure of adding a few more pangs to the pain I know must be gnawing out your heart."

Turning to the guards, he said:

"Go call for the two who were captured in the ruin, and bring them here."

Immediately two of the men departed.

In a few moments, they returned, conduct-

ing Loyal Kingdon and Yuma Yank, both of whom had their hands bound behind them.

"Waal, b'gash!" cried Yank, as his eyes fell on the helpless giant. "Ef hyer hain't his bigness!"

"It is the Giant Sport!" exclaimed Loyal.

"Kirect, lad, an' he seems ter be in 'bout ther same fix we-uns are. Holy cats! w'at's wuss then gittin' inter sech er 'tarnal scrape! I jest wish I wuz 'most anywhar else 'cept in this blessed fix—I jest do!"

"You see them!" cried Warwick, triumphantly, bending still lower over the giant. "Here are two of your friends, and they are as helpless as you."

But they were not the ones for which Seth had looked.

"They've got us, Pard Silver-edge," nodded the round-shouldered miner. "Now I wonder w'at they'll do with us? Fact is, I feel mighty oneasy on thet p'int."

Seth could not reply; hope seemed dying in his breast. What chance was there for him to escape the doom his bitter foe might see fit to mete out to him?

Warwick chuckled, as if he read these thoughts in the Sport's face.

"I have some pleasure left in seeing how it cuts you," he asserted. "But you have not begun to see all I have to show you.—Guards, make these fellows fast."

The order was soon obeyed, Yank and Loyal being secured to the wall, against which they were stood in plain view of the Goliath.

"Now bring the man and woman of Hidden Pocket," came the next command.

Two fellows departed, to soon return, conducting two more prisoners. And those two were—

Valois and Agnes!

A great groan came from Seth Culver's lips as he saw them. Eagerly, almost fiercely, he scanned the woman's face, and he saw she was in no way less beautiful than when he last looked upon her. She was pale and seemed sad, but her face was that of the wife he had loved. Added years had slightly added to her roundness of figure; the beauty of youth had turned to the noble beauty of womanhood.

The groan attracted her attention. Her eyes fell on the man who was held fast to the floor by an iron chain, and she halted in her tracks as if turned to stone. For several seconds she stood thus, staring, staring, staring! Slowly a look of horror crept across her now ghastly face. Her eyes dilated, and then she lifted one hand, to gasp:

"Seth!"

In another moment she would have sunk to the floor had not one of the guards caught her in his arms.

The Diamond Sport made a desperate struggle to burst the cords which held his hands, fairly thundering:

"Oh, you devils! If I were but free!"

Worth Warwick placed a silver whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast. In a moment a dozen black-attired figures sprang into the chamber, drawn weapons in their hands.

"You can see how helpless you would be were you free," said the villain, calmly. "If you attempted to fight, you would be riddled with bullets."

Then he turned to the men and bade them remain in the chamber.

"What do you think of my triumph, Seth Culver?" he cried. "Is not this worth living for? But, this is not all."

At a signal, Diamond Dion, or, properly, Valois Culver, was made fast to the wall near Yuma Yank. The half-conscious woman was placed on the cavern floor near him.

"This is a great round-up!" laughed Warwick. "It is even better than I dreamed. Guards, bring in the girl."

In a few moments Lois Culver was conducted to the chamber. She was very pale, and there was a look of terror in her wide-open eyes.

When Seth saw her, he cried:

"Lois, my child—my little one!"

She heard that familiar voice and sprang forward so suddenly she broke clear of the grasp of the guards.

"Where is he?" she shrieked. "I heard him call me!"

"Here, Lois!"

She saw him, staggered forward, dropped on her knees by his side—then, with a low moan, she sunk senseless across his body!

CHAPTER XL.

THE SPANIARD'S VENGEANCE.

WITH a sharp word of command, Worth Warwick made an impatient signal, at which the two guards sprang forward to lift the unconscious girl.

"Touch her—harm her and I will have your dastardly lives!" grated the iron-bound giant, forgetting himself for the moment and making a furious struggle to break free. "Oh, you devils! If I could get at you!"

"But you cannot," bowed Warwick. "The girl shall not be harmed, Seth. Those fellows shall handle her with care. She has simply swooned from excitement, and she will come round all right in a short time."

A blanket was spread on the cavern floor, and the unconscious girl was placed on the blanket.

By this time Agnes had fully recovered consciousness and was staring at Seth as if he were one risen from the dead.

"I have a little story to tell you," asserted Worth Warwick, calmly. "It will prove of interest to two of you at least, and it will be almost the crown of my work of vengeance. I had not thought to tell you this story now, but something draws it from me. One of the three whom it concerns has already heard it, and now the other two shall know how they were deluded."

Bidding the guards keep silent from interrupting him, the villain began his story. There is no need to repeat it, for it was substantially the same as he told to Seth Culver some hours before. There was no variation from the main points, and the wretch seemed to delight in the torture it caused two of his listeners.

When the story was finished, Warwick looked at his victims, evil satisfaction gleaming in his eyes and a malignant laugh coming from his lips.

"Quite a pretty little tale, eh?" he cried. "And it is true, every word of it—I swear it is true!"

On her knees Agnes Culver crept toward her bitterly wronged husband. Oh, what a wild, strange light there was in her pleading eyes! What a look transformed her beautiful face!

"What would you, woman?" cried the vile wretch who had wrought the wrong. "Do you think he can ever be aught to you since you have lived as the wife of another?"

She did not heed him. With clasped hands she knelt beside the man she had once called husband.

"Seth!" she whispered, softly. And then she stretched out her arms to him, sobbing:

"Seth, Seth!"

What was that look which leaped into his eyes? What was the transformation which passed over his face?

"Agnes!"

Great drops of perspiration started out on his forehead; his breathing was heavy and hard.

"I know it is asking too much," murmured the woman. "I have heard and I believe. Oh, heavens! that such a thing could be! And I loved you, Seth—I loved you all the time! But I thought you false! I was so deceived! I would ask—No, no! you can not grant it!"

"What is it you would ask, Agnes? Do not ask forgiveness, for you did not knowingly do a wrong, and there is nothing to forgive. Even when I believed you had wronged me intentionally, I forgave you in my heart, and I asked God to pardon you. Now that we both know the truth, why should I not forgive, if there is anything to forgive!"

"God bless you!" she murmured, brokenly. "All these years have been wasted, and all the years to come will be as naught, yet I am happy to know you were not false to me!"

"If you had only trusted a little more—if you had never lived as the wife of another—"

"The wife of another?"

"Yes, as the wife of my brother."

"Who says so?" she cried, glaring wildly about her—"who dares say such a thing?"

"I say so!" sneered Warwick.

"It is false!" she almost screamed. Then she turned to the helpless and amazed giant, speaking rapidly, almost incoherently: "Seth, you must believe me—you must! I swear by all I hold sacred I speak the truth—the truth! How can I make you believe—how shall I convince you? Look in my face—look in my eyes! I would not lie to you now! We are forever separated by the lies and trickery of this wretch—forever, forever, forever! What could I hope to win by telling you anything but the truth? I know it seems we have lived as man and wife, but it is not true—no, no, no! Val will tell you that—he will tell you now! I fled with him—I confess! He wanted me to have a ceremony performed, saying by the law of God, if not of man, I was no longer your wife. I would not! I should have taken my own life but for him; he saved me. Then he brought me to these mountains. From that time to this we have lived as brother and sister! Oh, you must believe! Behind in the great world he left a person who promised to let us know when you were dead. Then, when you were dead, I was to become Val's wife—not till then! He wanted to call me his wife, but I would not permit. If he has ever represented me as his wife, it was without my knowledge or consent. We lived here in the wilds—cared nothing for the world. He was like a brother to me, but a husband—never, never!"

A harsh laugh came from behind the mask that hid Worth Warwick's face.

"A pretty story!" fell contemptuously from his lips. "It is so wildly improbable that you cannot make any one believe it—unless they are foolish. The idea is simply ridiculous, and I know Seth Culver has sense enough not to take any stock in it. You cannot fool him thus."

Sue did not seem to hear him at all, for she

bent forward, her pleading eyes still fixed on Seth's face, whispering tremulously:

"You will believe me—Seth? By my mother's memory, I swear it is true! It will kill me if you do not believe! I know we can never again be anything to each other; it is not with such a hope I ask you to believe. See! I look you in the eyes! Can you read a lie in my face?"

He could not. He was beginning to believe, even though it seemed so wildly impossible that the man and woman had lived together so many years as brother and sister. He turned his eyes toward Valois.

"Val," he cried—"Val, my brother, is this true?"

"It is true!" was the reply that seemed fairly wrung from the lips of the Diamond Sport. "If I ever gave any one the impression that this woman was my wife, it was because I believed she would one day become so."

"Then—I—believe!"

"You cursed fool!" snarled Warwick, snatching out a knife and springing toward the helpless giant. "You deserve instant death for being such a dupe!"

But the woman sprung up and faced him, her bare hands thrust out till they almost touched the blade of the knife.

"You shall not touch him!" came sternly from her lips. "If you must use the knife, my own breast shall receive it!"

"Out of the way or I will cut you down!" shouted the villain.

A sudden signal passed between the men who were standing around, weapons suddenly appeared in their hands, and two of them sprung upon the chief!

"Seize and disarm him!" cried one who seemed to be the leader. "We can no longer trust ourselves to the leadership of a madman!"

"What's this?" screamed Warwick, hurling the two men back. "Treachery! Mutiny!"

"Down him!" again came the order from the new leader.

With a howl of fury, Warwick tore the mask from his face.

"I am betrayed by my own men!" he shouted. "But I will end the life of the man I hate!"

He made a rush for the helpless giant, but a blow from one of the outlaws sent him reeling aside.

Then a wild cry rung through the cavern.

"The devil Americano who ruined my sister's life! I will have his in return!"

Into the chamber sprung Manuel Covote, a knife in his hand. How he came there no man could tell, for he was not one of the outlaw band. Like a whirlwind he dashed upon Worth Warwick. The villain was armed with a knife, and he turned to face his new foe. They met.

With a clash, the blades of the knives came together, and in the next sixty seconds those within the chamber saw the most wonderful and furious knife-duel they had ever witnessed. The Spaniard seemed no less a madman than did his opponent. Blood stained the bright blades, but the duel continued till Manuel caught the other foul.

"This fer Pepital!" he screamed, then made the fatal stroke.

Down to the floor slipped Worth Warwick, death-stricken. The Spaniard paused to peer into his face for an instant, then, brandishing the avenging knife above his head, he dashed from the chamber, not a hand being lifted to stop him.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHT ON DARK POINTS.

For some time Devil Don's followers had been contemplating a revolt against their chief. Their principal reason for such a move was that they no longer wished to trust the leadership of the band to a madman, and a madman their chief had proved himself to be by many of his detestable acts.

The thing which aroused the men the most was the horrible death meted out to one of their number by the chief. Don suspected the fellow of treachery, and, although he had no proof, he had the man's hands bound behind him, then dragged him to the fiery furnace and thrust the poor wretch in, closing the iron door on him.

By that act the Scarlet Demon was doomed, for the men felt that no one knew when he was safe so long as he had such a leader. The revolt was carefully planned, and it came at a most opportune moment, so far as our friends were concerned, for had it not taken place when it did, they must have suffered at the hands of the madman.

But the Demon's minutes were numbered, for Manuel Covote's knife had done its work well.

Worth Warwick and Devil Don were one and the same!

Warwick had lost one of his eyes by an accident, and the removal of the glass eye which he usually wore, aided him in his make-up as the Demon. As Devil Don, his even and regular false teeth were replaced by a double-set of yellow tushes, which projected from his lips and seemed to change the whole contour of his face. A little grease-paint skillfully applied added to his hideousness; and then, when assuming the character of the fiend, he would contort his features as much as possible.

Years had passed since Seth Culver had looked on the face of Worth Warwick, who was not a bad-looking young man in those old days, and it was little wonder he could recognize nothing familiar in the face of the hideous Mountain Demon.

But, with all the craft of a madman, Warwick had played more than a double game, it may be said.

He was also Major Nepal Navrain!

How this could be I will try to make clear in a few words.

Navrain's features were well concealed by a beard, and his eyes were hidden by glasses, a fact which concealed from those who were intimate with him the knowledge that one of his eyes was artificial. His make-up as the old officer was an excellent disguise, and those not in the secret never for a moment suspected Major Navrain and Devil Don were one person.

It had seemed strange that the major should require so many cowboys on his ranch, but the old miner had never dreamed nearly every one of the men were outlaws. Hickory Ben, who had been shot to death by Stub Short on the night of the sham raid on the ranch, did not belong to the outlaw band and had refused to join at Short's urging. For that reason death became his portion.

Instead of leaving Kicker's Bar to go south on business, the "major" had ridden back to the hacienda with all speed, Gila Jack being instructed to loiter somewhat and take a roundabout course. So the scheming wretch arrived at the ranch ahead of the men he was deceiving, but he took good care to have the fact kept a secret and keep out of sight himself.

More than a year before the events of this story, Pepita Covote, the Spanish girl, had seen Warwick in Southern California and fallen in love with him. Manuel was opposed to his sister having anything to do with the American, but she would not heed his advice, and when Warwick disappeared she vanished with him. He brought her to his home almost within the shadows of the Devil's Mountains, and there she became aware of the triple life the man lived.

Pleased by the appearance of Loyal Kingdon, the girl sought to warn him of danger the first night after his arrival at the Twin Star Ranch.

Worth Warwick's unsettled brain was continually devising schemes to mystify and deceive any one who might by any chance suspect "Major Navrain" of having any connection with the Scarlet Demon, and for that reason the night raid on the corral was planned and carried out as described. It also gave the crafty creature an opportunity to get Seth Culver into his power long enough to tell him the true story of the estrangement of his wife, for Warwick had really performed the dastardly work he claimed.

The mirror trick was simple enough, the glass being set in such a way that it reflected a certain point on the opposite wall, and at that point a hidden door was set. From the bed that door came exactly in the range of the mirror. Disguised as Devil Don, his face aglow with phosphorus, Warwick had appeared at the secret opening, disappearing the instant the shot was fired at the mirror.

Of course, the capture of "Major Navrain" by Devil Don was also a trick, and, as no one but the cowboy outlaws were present at the time of the supposed encounter, that was one of the easiest deceptions worked upon our friends. The wounds of the cowboys who claimed to have taken part in the engagement were all imaginary, the bandages concealing the fact that they were not genuine.

In trailing the "major's" supposed captors the trail was purposely lost, and the cowboys made their way to Diamond Dion's home, intending to take the Sport a captive, according to orders received from their chief.

The Diamond Sport and Agnes escaped by the secret passage, but barely had they entered the old ruin when they were pounced upon and captured by the outlaws, as also were Yank and Loyal when they appeared later. The cowboy-outlaws had soon left the pocket and joined their comrades in the cavern.

The alcove trick was another of Warwick's crafty schemes, though it is hard to understand why he should put himself to so much trouble when it was scarcely possible he intended to allow Seth Culver to go forth from the cave alive. It can only be explained as another freak of the madman.

The opening between the wall that divided the two alcoves was there for the purpose of allowing Seth to look into the one where "Navrain" seemed confined. The guards' movements were well timed, and when he closed the opening with a stone the chief rascal was given an opportunity to carry out his scheme. The "major's" apparent fury at the guard gave him a chance to rattle his chains as he was freeing himself from them. Then he silently left the alcove by means of a rope ladder invisible to Seth when he looked in at the opening.

A short time later he appeared as Devil Don, one of his men having taken his place in the alcove, disguised as the pretended officer. This man was forced to endure the beating of his chief without uttering a word of protest. It was arranged to detach the stone from the wall at a

certain point in the game, and then the guard returned it in time for Warwick and his assistant to once more change places.

All this the maniac explained as he lay dying with Seth Culver bending over him, the giant having been released by the mutineers.

"I played the game well," gasped the expiring wretch; "and I should have won my revenge at last had it not been for that Spaniard. I have only a few minutes more to live, and now, in my last hour, the longing for revenge has gone from me. I no longer hate you, Culver, and I regret the suffering I have caused you. I feel as if a great pressure had been lifted from my brain, and I suppose it is true I was deranged. I must have been, even though my madness had a purpose—a terrible purpose."

Once more he assured them that all he had told them of the past and the cause of their being sundered was true, and then, after a brief time of terrible mental anguish, his soul passed into the hands of One who doeth all things well.

The outlaws had decided to leave that part of the country, so they saw no reason why their prisoners should not be released, as it could be of no advantage to keep them captives.

The opening of the cave proved to be in the old ruin, and there Shanks and Scraggs were found industriously searching for the lost treasure.

They were amazed and disgusted when Diamond Dion told them he had discovered and taken possession of it years before.

"By me faith!" howled Shanks, glaring daggers at the Diamond Sport, "but you should be made to disgorge your ill-gotten gains! This is little better than robbery!"

"Peace, peace, brother!" sighed the poet, a sad look settling on his face. "Fate has decreed it, and it is useless for us to kick.

"I'm stricken with grief,
I'm really upset,
For now I am where
I wish I were not;
The treasure is gone,
And I am dead broke,
My friends, do you call
This matter a joke?"

Then the poet and actor fell into each other's arms and wept. It was with difficulty they were induced to accompany the party back to the hacienda.

No longer under the command of the Demon, the outlaws treated our friends with greater courtesy than could be expected of such lawless characters.

There is no need to extend the story, for a few words concerning the characters met in these pages is all that is required.

Yuma Yank resumed his old wandering life, a luckless prospector continually expecting to make a strike. For all of his ill-fortune, he remained the same loyal, jovial soul, a most genial camp-fire companion when it comes to telling improbable yarns.

Manuel Coyote and his sister disappeared, and what became of them is not known.

Taos Tom and Crook-nose Chat drifted still further south after the disbanding of Devil Don's followers, joined a band of Mexican *ladrones*, were finally captured and executed, thus receiving their long-merited dues.

Gila Jack and Stub Short quarreled, fought it out with knives, and both were so badly cut they died from the wounds.

The other outlaws scattered and disappeared, but it is safe to say nearly all met violent deaths in some manner.

Of course Loyal married Lois, for he loved her sincerely, and she was not long in learning to love him as much. The union did not take place till nearly two years had elapsed after the events here narrated.

Seth Culver, no longer the "Silver-edged Sport," was the one who gave the blushing bride away. When the ceremony was over he turned to a regally handsome woman who appeared at his side, whispering softly:

"How happy they look, Agnes! Does it not recall to you our own marriage so many, many years ago? The black clouds which rose between us after that happy day have been all scattered at last, and the future holds naught but eternal sunshine for us—*my wife!*"

He felt the pressure of her hand on his arm, and her glorious dark eyes looked deep into the blue orbs of the man she could never doubt again.

Where was Valois?

Through the mining-camps of the Wild West roamed a sad, stern-faced man whose person was adorned by costly jewels and who was known far and wide as the Diamond Sport. He never remained in any place but a short time, for he seemed possessed by a fever of unrest that drove him on—forever on.

Attempts have been made to rediscover the great cave and furnace of burning natural-gas in the Devil's Mountains, but all efforts have been failures.

THE END.

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